

THE NAZI DICTATORSHIP

IAN KERSHAW

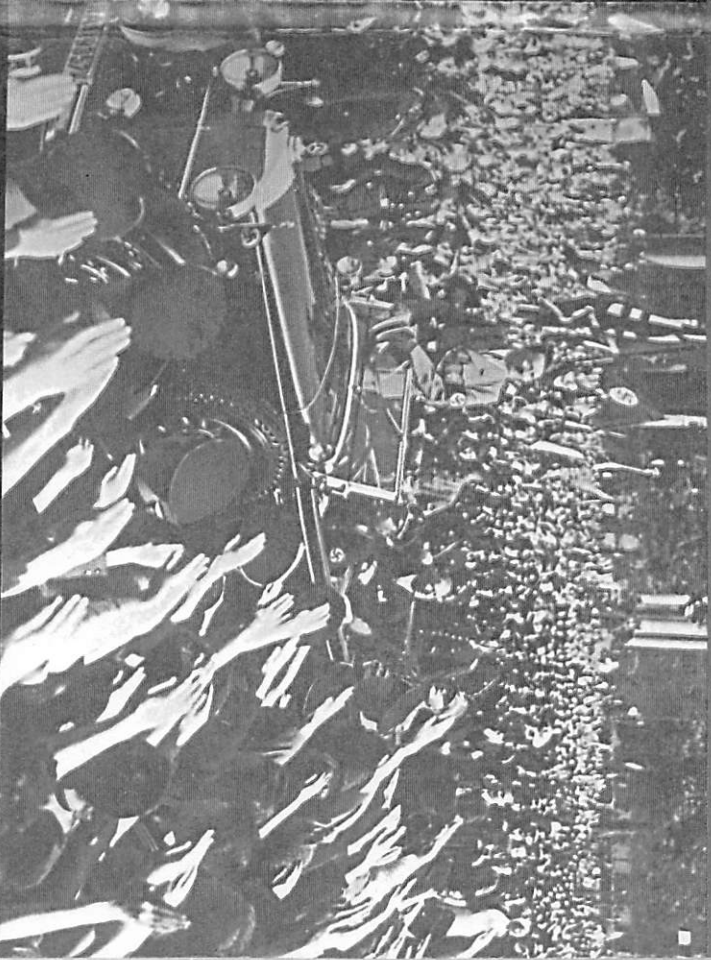
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As an exploration of the interpretational issues that eddy around the Third Reich, Ian Kershaw's *Nazi Dictatorship* has become a classic account. But if its core remains unchanged, its contents must necessarily reflect both new public controversies and the onrush of fresh research. In the fourth edition there are many changes of detail to accommodate this need and substantial rewritings of two chapters. No subject among those dealt with in earlier editions has been the subject of such intensive research – and bringing such rapidly changing interpretations – as 'Hitler and the Jews' and, accordingly, that chapter has been considerably changed. The book's final chapter has also undergone significant revision, to take account of the 'Goldhagen phenomenon', and also to glance back over the changing trends of research on the Third Reich as, with the passing of the generations, Hitler and his regime themselves pass into history.

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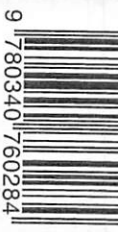
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Hitler and the Holocaust

Explaining the Holocaust stretches the historian to the limits in the central task of providing rational explanation of complex historical developments. Simply to pose the question of how a highly cultured and economically advanced modern state could 'carry out the systematic murder of a whole people for no reason other than that they were Jews' suggests a scale of irrationality scarcely susceptible to historical understanding.¹ The very name 'the Holocaust', which acquired its specific application to the extermination of the Jews only in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when it came to be adopted (initially by Jewish writers) in preference to the accurately descriptive term 'genocide', has been taken to imply an almost sacred uniqueness of terrible events exemplifying absolute evil, a specifically Jewish fate standing in effect outside the normal historical process – 'a mysterious event, an upside-down miracle, so to speak, an event of religious significance in the sense that it is not man-made as that term is normally understood'.²

The 'mystification' and religious-cultural eschatology which has come for some writers to be incorporated in the term 'the Holocaust' has not made the task of Jewish historians an easy one in a subject understandably and justifiably 'charged with passion and moral judgement'.³ Given the highly emotive nature of the problem, non-Jewish historians face arguably even greater difficulties in attempting to find the language sensitive and appropriate to the horror of Auschwitz. The sensitivity of the

1 Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews 1933-45* (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 17. For the following remarks, see Geoff Eley, 'Holocaust' (see ch. 1 note 45).

2 Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (London, 1978), p. 31. The chapter from which the quotation is taken is an attack on the 'mystification' (as Bauer put it) of the Holocaust. Bauer himself distinguished (pp. 31-5) between genocide – 'forcible, even murderous denationalization' – and the 'uniquely unique' Holocaust – 'total murder of every one of the members of the community'. I have to confess that I do not find the definitions or distinction very convincing or analytically helpful.

3 Dawidowicz, *War*, p. 17.

problem is such that over-heated reaction and counter-reaction easily spring from a misplaced or misunderstood word or sentence.

The perspective of non-Jewish historians is, however, inevitably different from that of Jewish historians. And if we are to 'learn' from the Holocaust, then – with all recognition of its 'historical' uniqueness in the sense that close parallels have not so far existed – it seems essential to accept that parallels *could* potentially occur in the future, and among peoples other than Germans and Jews. The wider problem alters in essence, therefore, from an attempt to 'explain' the Holocaust specifically through Jewish history or even German–Jewish relations, to the pathology of the modern state and an attempt to understand the thin veneer of 'civilization' in advanced industrial societies. Specifically applied to the Nazi Dictatorship, this demands an examination of complex processes of rule, and a readiness to locate the persecution of the Jews in a broader context of escalating racial discrimination and genocidal tendencies directed against various minority groups. This is not to forget the very special place which the Jews occupied in the Nazi doctrine, but to argue that the problem of explaining the Holocaust is part of the wider problem of how the Nazi regime functioned, in particular of how decisions were arrived at and implemented in the Nazi State.

The central issue remains, therefore, how Nazi hatred of the Jews became translated into the practice of government, and what precise role Hitler played in this process. Deceptively simple as this question sounds, it is the focal point of current controversy on 'the Holocaust' and forms the basis of the following enquiry, which attempts to survey and then evaluate recent research and interpretation.

Interpretations

Historians in both parts of Germany after the war came only slowly to concern themselves with anti-semitism and the persecution of the Jews. It was only in the wake of the Eichmann trial in Israel and the revelations of concentration camp trials in the Federal Republic that serious historical work on the Holocaust advanced in West Germany. Even then, historical scholarship and public 'enlightenment' on the fate of the Jews found only a muted echo in the German population, and popular consciousness was reached only through the showing of the American filmed 'soap-opera' dramatization of the Holocaust on West German television in 1979.⁴ In

⁴ See the excellent historiographical survey by Konrad Kwiet, 'Zur historiographischen Behandlung der Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich', *MGM* (1980), Heft 1, pp. 149–92, here esp. pp. 149–53; and the valuable study by Otto Dov Kulka, 'Major Trends and Tendencies of German Historiography on National Socialism and the "Jewish Question" (1924–1984)', *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 30 (1985), pp. 215–42. For other, thorough analyses of the, by now, massive extent of research on most aspects of the

the GDR, too, scholarly work on the persecution of the Jews effectively dates from the 1960s, though the subsuming, in the marxist-leninist conception of history, of race hatred within the nature of the class struggle and imperialism meant that down to the upheavals of 1989 few important works specifically on the Holocaust appeared.⁵ The publications of Kurt Pätzold, while remaining firmly anchored within the marxist-leninist framework, marked a significant advance in GDR scholarship in this field.⁶

The major impulses to research and to scholarly debate have, therefore, been initiated outside Germany – in the first instance by Jewish scholars in Israel and other countries, and secondarily from non-Jewish historians outside Germany. However, even where the initial stimulant to debate emanated from non-German writers – and the controversies stirred up by Hannah Arendt's publication on the Eichmann trial⁷, David Irving's attempt to whitewash Hitler's knowledge of the 'Final Solution'⁸, and most recently through the 'Goldhagen debate' (discussed in the final chapter) provide merely the most spectacular examples – ensuing discussion in the Federal Republic has been strongly influenced by the intellectual climate of German historical writing on Nazism which we have already examined. Hence, the contours of the debate about Hitler and the implementation of the 'Final Solution' – the subject of this chapter – are again peculiarly West German, even where valuable contributions have been made by foreign scholars.

The interpretational divide on this issue brings us back to the dichotomy of 'intention' and 'structure' which we have already encountered. The conventional and dominant 'Hitlerism' approach proceeds from the assumption that Hitler himself, from a very early date seriously contemplated, pursued as a main aim, and strived unshakeably to accomplish the physical annihilation of the Jews. According to such an interpretation, the various stages of the persecution of the Jews are to be directly derived from the inflexible continuity of Hitler's aims and intentions; and the 'Final Solution' is to be seen as the central goal of the Dictator from the very beginning of his political career, and the result of a more or less consistent

Holocaust, see the essays by: Saul Friedländer, 'From Anti-Semitism to Extermination. A Historiographical Study of Nazi Policies towards the Jews and an Essay in Interpretation', *Yad Vashem Studies* 16 (1984), pp. 1–50; and Michael Marrus, 'The History of the Holocaust. A Survey of Recent Literature', *JMH* 59 (1987), pp. 114–60. Most comprehensively, there is the fine study of Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (London, 1988).

⁵ See Konrad Kwiet, 'Historians of the German Democratic Republic on Antisemitism and Persecution', *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 21 (1976), pp. 173–98.

⁶ See Kurt Pätzold, *Faschismus, Rassenwahn, Judenverfolgung* (East Berlin, 1975), and 'Vertreibung' (see ch. 3 note 56).

⁷ See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London, 1963).

⁸ David Irving, *Hitler's War* (London, 1977). See the devastating critique by Martin Broszat, 'Hitler und die Genesis der "Endlösung"'. Aus Anlaß der Thesen von David Irving', *VfZ* 25 (1977), pp. 737–75, esp. pp. 759 ff. Engl. trans., 'Hitler and the Genesis of the "Final Solution": An Assessment of David Irving's Theses' in H. W. Koch, ed., *Aspects of the Third Reich* (London, 1985), pp. 390–429.

policy (subject only to 'tactical' deviation), 'programmed' by Hitler and ultimately implemented according to the Führer's orders. In contrast, the 'structuralist' type of approach lays emphasis upon the unsystematic and improvised shaping of Nazi 'policies' towards the Jews, seeing them as a series of *ad hoc* responses of a splintered and disorderly government machinery. Although, it is argued, this produced an inevitable spiral of radicalization, the actual physical extermination of the Jews was not planned in advance, could at no time before 1941 be in any realistic sense envisaged or predicted, and emerged itself as an *ad hoc* 'solution' to massive, and self-induced, administrative problems of the regime.

The interpretation of the destruction of European Jewry as the 'programmatic' execution of Hitler's unchangeable will has an immediate (though actually superficial) attractiveness and plausibility. It marries well with the views of those historians who incline to explanations of the Third Reich through the development of a specifically German ideology, where a great deal of weight is attached, as a causal factor in Nazism's success, to the spread of anti-semitic ideas and an ideological climate in which Hitler's own radical anti-semitism could find appeal.⁹ There is, of course, no difficulty in demonstrating the basic continuity and inner consistency of Hitler's violent hatred of the Jews – ranging from his entry into politics in 1919 to the composition of his Political Testament in the bunker at the end of April 1945 – voiced throughout in the most extreme language conceivable. The interpretation corresponds, too, to the 'totalitarianism' model where state and society were 'co-ordinated' to the level of executors of the wishes of Hitler, the unchallenged 'master of the Third Reich', who determined policy from above, at least in those spheres – like the 'Jewish Quotation' – where he had a paramount interest. Seen in this light, the logic of the course of anti-Jewish policy from the boycott and legislation of spring 1933 down to the gas chambers of Treblinka and Auschwitz seems clear. In crude terms, the reason why the Jews of Europe were murdered in their millions was because Hitler, the dictator of Germany, wanted it – and had done since he entered politics over two decades earlier.¹⁰ It is in short an explanation of the Holocaust which rests heavily upon an acceptance of the motive force and autonomy of individual will as the determinant of the course of history.

⁹ E.g. George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (London, 1964). The debate engendered by the publication of Daniel Goldhagen's controversial book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York, 1996), has helped to refocus attention on the significance and extent of popular anti-semitism in Germany, and has breathed new life into interpretations which view this as the prime cause of the Holocaust. For an excellent re-evaluation of the levels of anti-Jewish violence during the Weimar era, see Dirk Walter, *Antisemitische Kriminalität und Gewalt: Judenfeindschaft in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn, 1999).

¹⁰ Mason, 'Intention and Explanation' (see ch. 1 note 25), p. 32. See also the 'explanation' of the Holocaust given by Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans, and the 'Jewish Question'* (Princeton, 1984), p. 316: the reasons Jews were killed in their millions was 'that power was totally concentrated in one man, and that man happened to hate their "race"'.
¹¹ Dawidowicz, *War*, pp. 193–208.
¹² John Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (New York, 1976), pp. 88–9.
¹³ Haffner (see ch. 4 note 11), pp. 178–9.
¹⁴ Fest (see ch. 4 note 9), vol. 2, p. 930 (Ullstein edn., Frankfurt am Main/Berlin, Vienna, 1976); Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich, 1943 edn.), p. 772.
¹⁵ Binion (see ch. 4 note 12), p. 85 and chs. 1, 4; Toland, p. 934.

Numerous influential works on the destruction of the Jews have advanced this or similar types of 'Hitlerist' approach. Lucy Dawidowicz, in her widely acclaimed *The War against the Jews*, for instance, declares that Hitler's idea for the 'Final Solution' went back to his experience in the Pasewalk hospital in 1918, and that by the time he wrote the second volume of *Mein Kampf* in 1925, he 'openly espoused his programme of annihilation' in words which 'were to become the blueprint for his policies when he came to power'. She writes of 'the grand design' in Hitler's head, the 'long-range plans to realize his ideological goals' with the destruction of the Jews at their centre, and that the implementation of his plan was subject to opportunism and expediency. She concludes: 'Through a maze of time, Hitler's decision of November 1918 led to Operation Barbarossa. There never had been any ideological deviation or wavering determination. In the end only the question of opportunity mattered'.¹¹

A similar inclination to a personalized explanation of 'the Holocaust' can be found, not unnaturally, in leading biographies of Hitler. Toland has Hitler advocating, as early as 1919, the physical liquidation of Jewry and transforming his hatred of the Jews into a 'positive political programme'.¹² Haffner, too, speaks of a 'cherished wish to exterminate the Jews of the whole of Europe' as being Hitler's aim 'from the beginning on'.¹³ Fest relates the first gassing of Jews near Chelmno in Poland in 1941 to Hitler's own experience in the First World War and the notorious lesson he drew from it, as recorded in *Mein Kampf*, that perhaps a million German lives would have been saved if 12,000–15,000 Jews had been put under poison gas at the start of or during the war.¹⁴ And Binion's 'psycho-historical' study argues that Hitler's mission 'to remove Germany's Jewish cancer and to poison out Germany's Jewish poison' emanated from his hallucination while recovering from mustard-gas poisoning as Pasewalk, when he allegedly traumatized his mother's death while under treatment from a Jewish doctor and brought this in hysterical association with his trauma at Germany's defeat in 1918. Hitler 'emerged from his trance resolved on entering politics in order to kill the Jews by way of discharging his mission to undo, and reverse, Germany's defeat'. This was his 'main line political track' which ran from Pasewalk to Auschwitz.¹⁵

The same basic premise of the early formulation and unshakeable retention of Hitler's will to exterminate the Jews as sufficient explanation of 'the Holocaust' underlies Gerald Fleming's study, which seeks to document as fully as possible Hitler's personal responsibility for the 'Final Solution'. Though concentrating almost exclusively on the period of extermination

itself, the introductory chapters deal with the growth of Hitler's anti-semitism. There, the claim is repeatedly made that 'a straight path' led from Hitler's personal anti-semitism and the development of his original hatred of the Jews to his personal liquidation orders during the war – 'a straight path from Hitler's anti-semitism as shaped in Linz in the period 1904–7 to the first mass shootings of German Jews in Fort IX in Kowno on 25 and 29 November 1941'. Physical extermination, in Fleming's view, was the aim maintained continually by Hitler from his experience of the November Revolution in 1918 down to his end in the bunker, and at the beginning of the 1920s 'Hitler developed . . . a strategic plan for the realization of his political aim'.¹⁶

Unwavering continuity of aim, a dominance in shaping anti-Jewish policy from first to last, and the decisive role in the initiation and implementation of the 'Final Solution' are also attributed to Hitler in the most influential works of leading West German experts on the Third Reich. Though prepared to accord 'the historical situation a comparatively high rank in the implementation of National Socialist "Jewish Policy"',¹⁷ the 'programmatist' line (as it has been styled) sees Nazi anti-Jewish aims and measures as integrally linked to foreign policy, framed along with foreign policy in terms of long-range 'final goals', and advancing 'with inner logic, consistency, and in stages'.¹⁸ Klaus Hildebrand summarizes the position clearly and concisely: 'Fundamental to National Socialist genocide was Hitler's race dogma. . . . Hitler's programmatic ideas about the destruction of the Jews and racial domination have still to be rated as primary and causative, as motive and aim, as intention and goal (*Vorsatz and Fluchtpunkt*) of the "Jewish Policy" of the Third Reich'.¹⁹ For the Swiss historian Walter Hofer, 'it is simply incomprehensible how the claim can be made that the National Socialist race policy was not the realization of Hitler's *Weltanschauung*'.²⁰

Hofer's remarks were part of a particularly aggressive critique of the 'structuralist' approach of 'revisionist' historians. The particular target of attack in this instance was Hans Mommsen, who is accused of not seeing because he does not want to see the obvious connection between the announcement of Hitler's programme (in *Mein Kampf* and elsewhere) and its later realization.²¹ Mommsen himself has argued forcefully in a number of essays that the implementation of the 'Final Solution' can by no means be attributed to Hitler alone, nor to purely ideological factors in the

16 Gerald Fleming, *Hitler und die Endlösung. 'Es ist des Führers Wunsch'* (Wiesbaden/Munich, 1982), pp. 13–27 (where Hitler's 'straight path' is mentioned at least four times). An English translation is available: *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Oxford, 1986).

17 Hildebrand, *Das Dritte Reich*, p. 178.

18 Hillgruber, *Endlich genug?*, pp. 64–6 and p. 52 note 88.

19 Hildebrand, *Das Dritte Reich*, p. 178.

20 Hofer (see ch. 1 note 2), p. 14.

21 Hofer, p. 14.

German political culture.²² Rather, the explanation has to be sought in the peculiarly fragmented decision-making processes in the Third Reich, which made for improvised bureaucratic initiatives with their own inbuilt momentum, promoting a dynamic process of cumulative radicalization. In his view, the assumption that the 'Final Solution' had to stem from a 'Führer Order' is mistaken. Though unquestionably Hitler knew of and approved of what was taking place, such an assumption, argues Mommsen, flies in the face of his known tendency to let things take their own course and to put off decisions wherever possible. Moreover, it is not compatible with his conscious attempts to conceal his own personal responsibility, with his more subconscious suppression of actual reality even to himself – for all the violence of his propagandistic statements, he never spoke in concrete terms about the 'Final Solution' even in his intimate circle – nor with maintaining the fiction of 'labour deployment' and 'natural wastage' through work. Accordingly, concludes Mommsen, there could have been no formal 'Führer Order' – written or verbal – for the 'Final Solution' of the 'European Jewish Question'. References in the sources to an 'order' or 'commission' as opposed to a vague 'wish of the Führer' relate invariably to the '*Kommissarbefehl*' complex of orders of spring 1941. Though the mass shootings of Russian Jews derived from the '*Kommissarbefehl*' group of directives, they must be distinguished from the 'Final Solution' proper – the systematic extermination of European Jewry. And that the latter was based on a Hitler order is, in Mommsen's view, neither supported by the evidence, nor inherently likely. Rather, although Hitler was the 'ideological and political originator' of the 'Final Solution', a 'utopian objective' could be translated into hard reality 'only in the uncertain light of the Dictator's fanatical propaganda utterances, eagerly seized upon as orders for action by men wishing to prove their diligence, the efficiency of their machinery, and their political indispensability'.

An essentially similar interpretation was advanced by Martin Broszat in his penetrating analysis of the genesis of the 'Final Solution'.²³ Broszat argued that 'there had been no comprehensive general extermination order at all', but that 'the "programme" of extermination of the Jews gradually developed institutionally and in practice out of individual actions down to early 1942 and gained determinative character after the erection of the extermination camps in Poland (between December 1941 and July 1942)'.

22 See Hans Mommsen, 'Nationalsozialismus oder Hitlerismus?', pp. 66–70; 'National Socialism: Continuity and Change', p. 179; 'Hitler's Stellung', p. 61 ff. (full references above ch. 4 note 29), and esp. his outstanding essay 'Die Realisierung des Utopischen: Die "Endlösung der Judenfrage" im "Dritten Reich"', GG 9 (1983), pp. 381–420, here esp. pp. 394–5 and notes 48–9, 399, 416–18. An extended version of this last essay is published in English translation, 'The Realization of the Unthinkable: the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" in the Third Reich', in Gerhard Hirschfeld, ed., *The Policies of Genocide* (London, 1986), pp. 97–144 and in Hans Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz* (London, 1991), pp. 224–53.

23 Broszat, 'Genesis' (see note 8, this chapter), pp. 753–7.

In Broszat's view, deportation of the Jews was still the aim until autumn 1941, and it was only in the light of the unexpected failure of the Blitzkrieg invasion of the Soviet Union that problems in the deportation plans and the inability of Gauleiter, police chiefs, SS bosses, and other Nazi leaders in the Occupied Territories to cope with the vast numbers of Jews transported to and concentrated in their domains that led to a growing number of 'local initiatives' being taken to liquidate Jews, which then gained retrospective sanction 'from above'. Following this interpretation, therefore, 'the destruction of the Jews arose, so it seems, not only out of a previously existent will to exterminate, but also as the "way out" of a cul-de-sac into which [the regime] had manoeuvred itself. Once begun and institutionalized, the practice of liquidation nevertheless gained dominant weight and led finally *de facto* to a comprehensive "programme"'.²⁴

Broszat went out of his way in this essay (as had Mommsen in his writings) to emphasize that his interpretation could in no sense be seen in moral terms as removing the responsibility and guilt for the 'Final Solution' from Hitler, who approved, sanctioned, and empowered the liquidation actions 'whoever suggested them'. However, it does mean that in terms of actual practice of the implementation of the 'Final Solution', Hitler's personal role can only be indirectly deduced.²⁴ And morally, this clearly extends the responsibility and culpability to groups and agencies in the Nazi State beyond the Führer himself.

The role of Hitler is reduced still further in the analysis of the GDR historian Kurt Pätzold, who also demonstrates clearly the gradual and late emergence of an extermination 'policy' arising from unco-ordinated but increasingly barbarous attempts to drive Jews out of Germany and German-ruled territory.²⁵ While his description of the process which led from the aim of expulsion to genocide matches 'structuralist' explanations of western historians, Pätzold relates this to a sense of dynamic 'purpose' and direction of the Nazi regime which sometimes appears to be missing from 'structuralist' accounts. Despite a ritualistic overemphasis upon the functional purpose of anti-Jewish measures in serving the interests of monopoly capital, Pätzold's treatment has the merit, it seems to me, of locating the destruction of the Jews as an element within the overall context of the ruthless and dehumanizing expansionist drive of the Nazi State. This is to turn round the 'Hitlerist' interpretation, where the purposeful direction of Nazism is attributed as good as exclusively to the ideology of the Führer, and where Nazi *Lebensraum* ambitions are regarded as subsumed within and ultimately subordinate to Hitler's manic determination to destroy the Jews.

The lack of a long-range extermination programme has also come to be accepted by leading Israeli experts on 'the Holocaust'. Yehuda Bauer, for

²⁴ Broszat, 'Genesis', pp. 756–7.

²⁵ Pätzold, 'Vertreibung' (see ch. 3 note 56).

instance, writes that 'Nazi policy towards the Jews developed in stages, but that does not mean that at any given turning point there were not other options open to the Nazis that were considered seriously; there developed in Nazi Germany only one clear idea regarding Jews that was accepted by all policy-makers, namely the idea that ultimately the Jews had no place in Germany'.²⁶ Such a position is a recognition of the findings of detailed historical research on the course of anti-Jewish policy during the 1930s, where thorough analysis has suggested that the 'road to Auschwitz', was a 'twisted' one and not at all the 'straight path' which Fleming and others have seen.²⁷ Karl Schleunes's conclusion was, in fact, that 'the figure of Adolf Hitler during these years of search is a shadowy one. His hand appears only rarely in the actual making of Jewish policy between 1933 and 1938. One can only conclude from this that he occupied his time with more important concerns. In part the vagaries and inconsistencies of Jewish policy during the first five years of Nazi rule stem from his failure to offer guidance'.²⁸ Absence of clear objectives led to varying and rival 'policies', all of which ran into difficulties. But there was no turning back on the 'Jewish Question', and it was in this fashion that Hitler's known ideological obsession with the Jews had the objective function – without Hitler having to lift a finger – of pushing a

²⁶ Bauer, p. 11.

²⁷ See particularly the works of Schleunes and Adam (see ch. 3 note 54).

²⁸ Schleunes, p. 258. This interpretation has been directly called into question in a well-researched article by David Bankier, 'Hitler and the Policy-Making Process in the Jewish Question', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3 (1988), pp. 1–20. Bankier succeeds in demonstrating that Hitler did intervene in the 'Jewish Question' more often than has been thought, and that he showed from time to time interest even in the minutiae of anti-Jewish policy. Even so, Bankier takes the thrust of his findings too far in claiming that Hitler 'conceived, initiated, and directed the entire process' (p. 17), and his argument appears to be based in part on a misunderstanding (or exaggeration) of the structuralist (or functionalist) case he is attacking. No one, for example, doubts Hitler's pragmatism and opportunism in the 'Jewish Question', which Bankier is rightly keen to emphasize (pp. 5–8). Bankier's attack on the view (attributed to me among others) that Hitler was 'a moderate' in anti-semitic policy rests on a misunderstanding. Even the most ardent 'structuralist' would regard Hitler as the most radical of the radicals in sentiment and any 'moderation' – a term, incidentally, which Bankier himself uses on one occasion (p. 16) – as merely deployed for tactical purposes, a point I myself sought to emphasize in *The Hitler Myth*, (see ch. 4 note 37) e.g. pp. 236, 239, 250–1. Nor has it even been in dispute that Hitler's 'profound interest in all matters concerning Jews served as a guideline for state policy in the Jewish Question' (p. 11), or that 'Hitler's ideology was an undeniably powerful factor in the shaping of Nazi antisemitic policy' (p. 16). Within this framework, on which there can be little disagreement, the evidence cited by Bankier interestingly reveals instances of contradictions (p. 13) in Hitler's stance, as well as 'non-decisions' (pp. 10–11). Cases which Bankier cites of Hitler's intervention more often than not arise from points of contention where he is asked to settle a problem, and the generalization that 'it was in fact Hitler and not others who initiated radical measures' (p. 7) is overdrawn. Hitler's own words on 25 October 1941, which Bankier cites (p. 7, from H. R. Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler's Table Talk* (London, 1953), p. 90; see Werner Jochmann, *Adolf Hitler, Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944* (Hamburg, 1980)), that 'even with regard to the Jews, I have found myself remaining inactive' – for tactical reasons, let it again be stressed – are themselves an indication that radicalization in the 'Jewish Question' could occur in the absence of his close involvement in the direction of policy.

failure in one direction (boycott, legislation, 'Aryanization', or emigration) into a renewed effort to 'solve the problem'.²⁹ Once again, there is no doubting Hitler's moral responsibility, nor the role his intentions – real or *presumed* – played. But of a consistent implementation of ideological prerogatives, there is little or nothing to be seen: 'The Final Solution as it emerged in 1941 and 1942 was not the product of a grand design'.³⁰

The exploration of Uwe Dietrich Adam, which had the added advantage of continuing the investigation into the wartime period down to the implementation of the 'Final Solution' itself, arrived at similar conclusions: 'The empirical facts confirm first of all that there can be no talk of a planned and directed policy in this field, that a comprehensive plan for the method, content, and extent of the persecution of the Jews never existed, and that the mass killing and extermination, too was most probably not striven after *a priori* by Hitler as a political aim'. Unlike Broszat, Adam attributes the commencement of the 'Final Solution' to a personal order of Hitler in autumn 1941. However, in his view this has to be placed in the context of 'an inner development, which bound Hitler too in no small part'.³¹

At the root of the divergence in historical explanations of 'the Holocaust' summarized here lies the basic dichotomy between 'intention' and 'structure'. Was the systematic extermination of European Jewry the direct realization of Hitler's ideologically motivated 'design for destruction', which, after various stages in an exorable process of development, he set into operation through a written or, more likely, verbal 'Führer Order' sometime in 1941? Or did the 'Final Solution' emerge piecemeal, and without any command of Hitler, as 'an imperative result of the system of cumulative radicalization'³² in the Third Reich? We turn now to a brief evaluation of these positions and an appraisal of some of the available evidence on which an interpretation must be based. Some new perspectives have opened up with the accessibility, since the demise of the Soviet bloc, of sources in eastern Europe.³³

29 See Schleunes, p. 259.

30 Schleunes, Introduction, p. 2.

31 Adam, *Judenpolitik*, pp. 313, 357–60. See also Uwe Dietrich Adam, 'An Overall Plan for Anti-Jewish Legislation in the Third Reich?', *Yad Vashem Studies* 11 (1976), pp. 33–35, here pp. 34–5. The lack of a long-term 'extermination plan' is fully upheld in two later analyses, by Arno Mayer and Philippe Burrin. Though their interpretations differ in important respects, both argue that physical extermination arose as a comprehensive 'solution' during the course of the Russian campaign. See Arno J. Mayer, *Why did the Heavens not Darken. The 'Final Solution' in History* (New York, 1989) and Philippe Burrin, *Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust* (London, 1994; orig. French edn. 1989).

32 Mommsen, 'Realisierung', p. 399 note 65.

33 For an important study exploring the genesis of the 'Final Solution' in the light of the findings of the most recent research, including that in East European and Russian archives, see Peter Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung: Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung* (Munich, 1998). A summary of developments in research on the emergence of the 'Final Solution', and in a number of important regional analyses of extermination policy as it unfolded are brought together in Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998). An English translation is in preparation.

Evaluation

It seems important to re-emphasize at the outset that, despite claims sometimes made by those adopting a 'Hitlerist' interpretation, Hitler's continuous personal hatred of the Jews, his unique and central importance to the Nazi system in general and to the unfolding of its anti-Jewish policy in particular, and his moral responsibility for what took place are not at stake in the debate.

Historians favouring a 'structuralist' approach readily accept the overwhelming evidence that Hitler maintained a personal, pathologically violent hatred of Jews (whatever its derivation) throughout his political 'career', and recognize, too, the importance of that paranoid obsession *in determining the climate* within which the escalating radicalization of anti-Jewish policies took place. To put the counter-factual point at its crudest: without Hitler as head of the German State between 1933 and 1945, and without his fanaticism on the 'Jewish Question' as impulse and sanction, touchstone and legitimation, of escalating discrimination and persecution, it seems hardly conceivable that the 'Final Solution' would have occurred. This thought itself is sufficient to posit a fundamental link between Hitler and genocide. Moreover, the moral allegation against 'structuralist' historians – that they are 'trivializing' the wickedness of Hitler – is also misplaced. The 'structuralist' approach in no sense denies Hitler's personal, political, and moral responsibility for 'the Holocaust'. But it does broaden that culpability to implicate directly and as active and willing agents large sections of the German non-Nazi élites in the army, industry, and bureaucracy alongside the Nazi leadership and Party organizations. In fact, if anything it is the apparent need to find a supreme culprit which comes close to trivializing *in terms of historical explanation* by diverting attention from the active forces in German society which did not have to be given a 'Führer Order' to turn the screws of Jewish persecution one thread further until extermination became the logical (and only available) 'solution'. The question of allocating guilt thus distracts from the real question the *historian* has to answer: precisely *how* genocide could happen, how an unbalanced, paranoid hatred and chiliastic vision became reality and implemented as horrific government practice.

Rather, the central areas of debate among historians are: whether evidence of Hitler's continued and consistent personal hatred is sufficient explanation in itself of the Holocaust (given a background of widespread racial anti-semitism and ideological hatred of Jews, and a corresponding readiness to carry out 'Führer Orders'); whether physical extermination was Hitler's aim from a very early date or emerged as a realistic idea only as late as 1941 or so – the last remaining option in 'solving the Jewish Question'; and finally, whether it was necessary for Hitler to do more than establish the underlying objective of 'getting rid of Jews' from German territory, and then sanction the unco-ordinated but increasingly radical

steps of the various groups in the State who were seeking, often for their own reasons and by no means primarily motivated by anti-semitic ideology, to turn this distant objective into practical reality. These are open questions, not foregone conclusions or matters for dogmatic assertion.

A problem with the 'intentionalist' position – in particular with its extreme 'grand design' variant – is an implicit teleology which takes Auschwitz as a starting-point and looks backwards to the violent expression of Hitler's early speeches and writing, treating these as a 'serious declaration of intent'.³⁴ Because Hitler frequently spoke about destroying the Jews, and the destruction of the Jews actually took place, the logically false conclusion is drawn that Hitler's expressed 'intention' must have caused the destruction. In the light of hindsight, it is easy to attribute a concrete and specific meaning to the barbarous, but vague and fairly commonplace, generalities about 'getting rid' (*Entfernung*) or even 'extermination' (*Vernichtung*) of Jews, which were part and parcel of Hitler's language (and that of others on the *völkisch* Right) from the early 1920s onwards. Coupled with this is the problem of establishing empirically Hitler's initiation or direct instigation of shifts in policy towards fulfilment of his aims – a problem accentuated by Hitler's obvious desire not to be publicly associated with inhumane and brutal measures, and the secrecy and euphemistic language which camouflaged the 'Final Solution' itself. If 'programme', 'plan', or 'design' in the context of Nazi anti-Jewish policy are to have real meaning, then they ought to imply something more than the mere conviction, however fanatically held, that somehow the Jews would be 'got rid of' from German territory and from Europe as a whole, and the 'Jewish Question' solved. Before 1941, the evidence that Hitler had more than such vague and imprecise convictions is slender. Finally, the moral 'lesson' to be drawn from the 'Hitlerlist' position – apart from the 'alibi' it provides for non-Nazi institutions in the Third Reich – is by no means obvious. Fleming's rather jejune moral conclusion based upon his 'intentionalist' account of the 'Final Solution' is that hatred feeds the animal instinct for destruction of human life which resides in us all.³⁵

More important than such bland moralization is the question posed by 'structuralist' approaches, of how and why a political system in all its complexity and sophistication can within the space of less than a decade become so corrupt that it regards the implementation of genocide as one of its supreme tasks. The central issue here revolves around the nature of 'charismatic' politics – how Hitler's vaguely expressed 'intent' was interpreted and turned into reality by government and bureaucratic agencies which developed their own momentum and impetus. The 'structuralist'

34 Mommsen, 'Nationalsozialismus oder Hitlerismus?', p. 67.

35 Fleming, p. 206. See also p. 204 for his conclusion that those implementing Hitler's orders acted out of opportunism, servility, lack of character, and 'the petty-bourgeois zeal of a following whose idealism was abused'.

type of interpretation also has some weaknesses. The empirical data are seldom good enough to allow detailed reconstruction of the processes of decision-making, on which much of the argument resides. And the emphasis upon contingency, lack of planning, absence of co-ordination, governmental chaos, and the *ad hoc* 'emergence' of policy out of administrative disorder seems at times potentially in danger of neglecting the motive force of intention (however vaguely expressed) and distorting the focus of the regime's ideologically rooted thrust and dynamic drive. However, the 'structuralist' approach does provide the opportunity of *locating* Hitler's 'intentions' within a governmental framework which allowed the bureaucratic implementation of a loose ideological imperative, turning a slogan of 'get rid of the Jews' into a programme of annihilation. And concentration on the historical question of how 'the Holocaust' happened rather than, implicitly or explicitly, seeking to allocate guilt makes the issue of whether Hitler took the initiative at every turn, or whether a particular decision was his alone, seem less relevant and important.

During the pre-war years, as the evidence assembled and analysed by Schleunes and Adam convincingly demonstrates, it seems clear that Hitler took no specific initiative in the 'Jewish Question' and *responded* to rather than instigated the confused and often conflicting lines of 'policy' which emerged.³⁶ The main impulses derived from the pressure 'from below' of Party activists, the internal organizational and bureaucratic dynamism of the SS-Gestapo-SD apparatus, the personal and institutional rivalries which found an outlet in the 'Jewish Question', and, not least, from economic interest in eliminating Jewish competition and expropriating Jewish capital.

The national boycott of Jewish businesses which took place on 1 April 1933 was organized chiefly as a response to the pressure of Party radicals, especially within the SA, during the wave of violence and brutality unleashed by the 'seizure of power'. The only 'plans' of the NSDAP for tackling the 'Jewish Question' which had been formulated before Hitler became Chancellor related to measures for legal discrimination and deprivation of civil rights.³⁷ Such vague and undetailed administrative 'plans' hardly accorded with the wild and dangerous mood of Party activists in the post-'seizure of power' euphoria of spring 1933. In these weeks, in fact, no directives at all on 'the Jewish Question' came either from the Reich Chancellery or from the Nazi Party headquarters.³⁸ Meanwhile, the SA, whose 'enthusiasm' could hardly now be checked, had started its own anti-Jewish campaign of boycotts and violence. When Gestapo chief Rudolf

36 In his recent fine study of anti-Jewish policy during the 1930s, Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (London, 1997), while accepting significant impulses deriving from other sources, emphasizes more strongly the personal role of Hitler and the function of his ideology in the escalating persecution, feeling that (p. 3), 'over time, the contrary interpretations have . . . gone too far'.

37 Schleunes, p. 70; Adam, *Judenpolitik*, pp. 28 ff.

38 Schleunes, p. 71.

Diels complained about the excesses of the Berlin SA, he was informed that 'for very human reasons, certain activity must be found which will satisfy the feelings of our comrades'.³⁹ Under pressure, Hitler reacted towards the end of March with the call for a general boycott against Jewish businesses and professions, starting on 1 April and to be organized by a 14-man steering committee under the direction of Julius Streicher. As is well known, the boycott was a notable failure, and in the light of the negative echo abroad, the lack of enthusiasm among important sectors of the conservative power-élite (including President Hindenburg), and the cool indifference of the German people, it was called off after a single day and a co-ordinated national boycott was never again attempted. The shameful discriminatory legislation of the first months of the Dictatorship, aimed at Jews in the civil service and the professions, arose in the same climate and under the same pressures. Hitler's own direct role was a limited one dictated by the need he felt, despite his obvious approval of the boycott, to avoid association with the worst 'excesses' of the Party radicals. But the pace was forced by the momentum of the violence and illegalities, which produced their own compulsion to provide *post facto* legitimation and sanction – a process which was to repeat itself in later stages of the persecution of the Jews.⁴⁰

Following a relatively quiet period between the summer of 1933 and the beginning of 1935, a new anti-semitic wave began and lasted until the autumn of 1935. Again, the agitation was set in motion and sustained 'from below' through the pressure at Gau level and from activists in the Party and in Hitler Youth and SA units in the localities. One Gauleiter noted in his report that stirring up the 'Jewish Question' had been useful in revamping the sagging morale of the lower middle class.⁴¹ The agitation was, of course, backed by propaganda from the party and from the State. But other than that, there was remarkably little intervention from either the Party's headquarters or from the Reich government before mid August, when the boycotts and violence were becoming recognizably counter-productive, both in the repercussions for the German economy and on account of the unpopularity of the frequent breaches of the peace. Hitler himself was hardly involved in any direct sense. Despite his radical instincts, he was effectively compelled in this phase – in the interests of 'order', of the economy, and of diplomatic relations – to recognize the necessity of bringing the damaging campaign to a close.⁴² This had to be balanced against the need not to lose face with Party activists and the pressure to comply with Party demands for 'action' – particularly for legislation in line with the demands of the Party programme – in the 'Jewish Question'. The resulting 'compromise' was effectively the promulgation of

39 Cited in Schleunes, p. 74.

40 Schleunes, pp. 92–102; Adam, *Judenpolitik*, pp. 64 ff., esp. p. 68.

41 Marlis G. Steinert, *Hitler's Krieg und die Deutschen* (Düsseldorf/Vienna, 1970), p. 57.

42 Adam, *Judenpolitik*, p. 121.

the notorious 'Nuremberg Laws' in September 1935 – at one and the same time according with demands for clear guidance and 'regulation' of the 'Jewish Question', and a further turn of the discriminatory screw.

The creation of the Nuremberg Laws demonstrates clearly how Hitler and the Nazi leadership responded to the considerable pressures from below in their formulation of anti-Jewish policy at this date.

The agitation and violence of the spring and summer 1935 rekindled expectations within the Party of incisive anti-Jewish legislation.⁴³ Hints and half-promises of measures were made by Reich Minister of the Interior Frick and others, bureaucrats hurried to regulate discrimination which was already taking place, and bans on various Jewish activities introduced independently by the Gestapo also forced retrospective sanctions by the administrators. One area of discontent among Party agitators was the failure to introduce the long-awaited exclusion of Jews from German Citizenship. Despite indications from the Reich Ministry of the Interior, where preparations were underway, the summer brought nothing to satisfy the hotheads. The other major issue whipped up by propaganda and agitation was that of mixed marriages and sexual relations between 'Aryans' and Jews. Again, illegal but sanctioned terroristic actions in cases of 'racial defilement' forced the pace and shaped the atmosphere. The urgent need for legislation was accepted by the regime's leaders at an important ministerial meeting chaired by Schacht on 20 August. Only the timing remained undecided. There were in fact already rumours in the foreign press in late August that the official proclamation might come at the Nuremberg Party Rally in September. Though such rumours turned out to be accurate, it is possible that they were at the time no more than intelligent speculation since it still appears that the decision to promulgate the laws at a special meeting of the Reichstag summoned to Nuremberg was taken only after the Rally had actually started – probably under renewed pressure from 'Reich Doctors' Leader' Gerhard Wagner who, apparently after talks with Hitler, announced on 12 September the intention of promulgating a 'Law for the Protection of German Blood'. From this point, as is well known, things moved fast. 'Experts' on the 'Jewish Question' were suddenly summoned to Nuremberg on 13 September and told to prepare a law regulating marriage between 'Aryans' and Jews. The sudden decision to promulgate anti-Jewish laws during the Rally seems to have been predominantly determined by questions of propaganda, presentation, and image. The Reichstag had been summoned to Nuremberg, where Hitler originally

43 This account of the genesis of the Nuremberg Laws is primarily based upon Adam, *Judenpolitik*, pp. 118–22, 126; Schleunes, pp. 120–1; and, especially, upon the analyses of Lothar Gruchmann, "Blutschutzgesetz" und Justiz. Zur Entstehung und Auswirkung des Nürnberger Gesetzes vom 15. September 1935', *VfZ* 31 (1983), pp. 418–42, here esp. pp. 428–33, and Otto Dov Kulka, 'Die Nürnberger Rassengesetze und die deutsche Bevölkerung im Lichte geheimer NS-Lage- und Stimmungsberichte', *VfZ* 32 (1984), pp. 582–624, here esp. pp. 614–20.

intended, in the presence of the Diplomatic Corps, to make an important statement on foreign policy, exploiting the Abyssinian conflict to articulate German revisionist demands. On the advice of Foreign Minister von Neurath, this plan was dropped on 13 September. A suitable replacement programme for the Reichstag and for Party consumption had rapidly to be found.⁴⁴ The rather undramatic 'Flag Law' hardly matched the demands of the occasion. Hence, the 'Blood Law', now being frantically drafted, and a Reich Citizenship Law, drafted in an hour on 14 September, were brought in as a substantial offering to the Reichstag and the assembled Party faithful. Hitler himself, who chose the mildest of the four drafts of the 'Blood Law' presented to him, apparently preferred to remain in the background during the drafting, pushing the Racial Political Office to the forefront. His role was a characteristically vague and elusive one in the question of how to define 'a Jew', when a conference for this purpose met at Munich at the end of the month. Hitler confined himself to a long monologue on the Jews, announced that the definitional problem would be sorted out between the Reich Ministry of Interior and the Party, and adjourned the conference. It was mid November before State officials and representatives of the party could iron out a compromise solution – after Hitler had cancelled a further planned meeting in early November at which he had been expected to resolve the matter.⁴⁵

Hitler continued to take no initiative in the 'Jewish Question' during the relatively quiet years of 1936–7, in which the rivalries mounted between the various agencies with an interest in Jewish affairs – the Ministry of the Interior, the Economics Ministry, the Foreign Ministry, the Four Year Plan Administration, the Rosenberg Agency, and, not least, the SS and Gestapo apparatus. A clear line of policy was as distant as ever. To go for Goebbels's informative diary record of these years, Hitler appears to have spoken directly about the Jews only infrequently, and then in general terms, as in November 1937, when, in a long discussion with Goebbels about the 'Jewish Question', he allegedly said: 'The Jews must get out of Germany, yes out of the whole of Europe. That will take some time yet, but will and must happen', According to Goebbels, the Führer was 'firmly decided' on it.⁴⁶

These comments followed only a few weeks after Hitler had made his first public attack on the Jews for some time in a rhetorical propaganda tirade against 'the Jewish-Bolshevik World Enemy' during the Party rally

44 Mommsen, 'Realisierung', p. 387 and note 20. See also, for this section, Adam, *Judenpolitik*, pp. 125 ff., and Schleunes, pp. 121 ff.

45 Adam, *Judenpolitik*, pp. 135–40; Schleunes, p. 128. Bankier (p. 14) points out that the first implementation ordinances to the Nuremberg Laws, legally defining a Jew, were reshaped to conform with Hitler's view. But Hitler's uncertainty, then anxiety to reach a compromise solution, are confirmed by Goebbels's diary notes – *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels* (see ch. 4 note 83), vol. 2, pp. 520–1, 536–7, 540–1, entries of 1 Oct., 7 and 15 Nov. 1935.

46 *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, vol. 3, p. 351, entry of 30 Nov. 1937.

in September 1937.⁴⁷ This was enough to set the tone for a renewal of anti-semitic activity on a large scale. However, Hitler himself needed to do no more in order to stimulate the process of 'aryanization' of Jewish concerns in the interests of 'big business', which set in at the end of 1937 and where Göring was the chief driving-force, nor to direct the escalating wave of violence which followed the *Anschluß* and became magnified during the Sudeten crisis of the summer. The agitation and terror of the Party rank-and-file in the summer and autumn of 1938, together with the expulsion in October of some 17,000 Polish Jews living in Germany – a move itself prompted by actions of the Polish government to deny them re-entry into Poland – shaped the ugly atmosphere which exploded in the so-called 'Crystal Night' pogrom of 9–10 November. And, as is generally known, the initiator here was Goebbels, who sought to exploit the situation in an attempt to re-establish his waned favour and influence with Hitler. Other than giving Goebbels the green light verbally, Hitler himself took care to remain in the background, and to accept no responsibility for actions which were both unpopular with the public and castigated (though of course not from humane motives) by Nazi leaders.⁴⁸

Previously missing sections of Goebbels' diaries, discovered in archives in Moscow, cast new light on the instigation of the pogrom, and on the respective roles of Hitler and Goebbels. 'I put the matter before the Führer', Goebbels noted, in his description of the gathering of the Party faithful in the Old Town Hall in Munich on the evening of 9 November 1938. 'He decides: let the demonstrations carry on. Pull back the police. The Jews should for once be made to feel the full fury of the people.' 'That is right', continued the Propaganda Minister. 'Straightaway I give directions along those lines to police and Party.' Immediately afterwards, Goebbels gave his rabble-rousing speech to the Party leaders, who then raced to the telephone to set the 'action' in motion. 'Now the people will act', wrote Goebbels. Hitler, it is clear from the diaries, also gave the order that night for the immediate arrest of 20,000–30,000 Jews.⁴⁹ The following morning, 10 November, when Goebbels reported on the progress of the pogrom, Hitler

47 Adam, *Judenpolitik*, p. 173.

48 See Adam, *Judenpolitik*, pp. 206–7; Schleunes, ch. 7 (esp. pp. 240 ff.). In general, for the pogrom and its aftermath, Rita Thalmann and Emmanuel Feinermann, *Crystal Night: 9–10 November 1938* (London, 1974). A later, well-researched if journalistic, account is Anthony Read and David Fisher, *Kristallnacht. Unleashing the Holocaust* (London, 1989). A good brief analysis, locating the pogrom in the historical context of anti-semitism and discrimination against Jews in Germany, is provided by Hermann Graml, *Reichskristallnacht. Antisemitismus und Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1988). Engl. trans., *Antisemitism and its Origins in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1992). An excellent collection of essays, brought out on the 50th anniversary of the pogrom and summarizing much recent research, is: Walter H. Pehle, ed., *Der Judenpogrom 1938. Von der 'Reichskristallnacht' zum Völkermord* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988). Engl. trans. *November 1938. From 'Kristallnacht' to Genocide* (New York/Oxford, 1991).

49 *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. Elke Fröhlich, Pt. I, vol. 6, pp. 180–1, entry of 10 Nov. 1938.

showed full agreement: 'his views are very radical and aggressive', commented Goebbels. Hitler also approved 'with minor alterations' the decree which Goebbels prepared once it was felt the time had come to break off the 'action', and also indicated his wish for 'very sharp measures' against the Jews in the economic sphere – for the compulsory restoration of their businesses within any insurance contributions, and their subsequent gradual expropriation. Again, Goebbels then gave out the 'secret decrees' to put this into practice.⁵⁰

'Crystal Night', concludes Schleunes, 'was a product of the lack of co-ordination which marked Nazi planning on Jewish policy and the result of a last-ditch effort by the radicals to wrest control over this policy'.⁵¹ In propaganda terms, it was a failure. But, as usual, Nazi leaders, differing in their proposals for tackling the problem, concurred in the view that radical measures were needed. Jews were now excluded from the economy, and responsibility for 'the solution of the Jewish Question', though formally entrusted to Göring, was effectively placed in the hands of the SS. Emigration, which had significantly increased in the panic after the pogrom, remained the main aim, and was to be channelled through a central office set up in January 1939. The start of the war did not alter this aim. But it did alter the possibilities of its implementation.

The war itself and the rapid conquest of Poland brought about a transformation in the 'Jewish Question'. Forced emigration was no longer an option, and plans, for instance, to try to 'sell' Jews for foreign currency were not now feasible. After working on the idea of making German territory 'free of Jews' the Nazis now of course had an additional three million Polish Jews to cope with. On the other hand, there was now little need for consideration of foreign reactions, so that treatment of Polish Jews – as 'eastern Jews' particularly despised and dehumanized, the lowest form of existence in a conquered enemy itself held in contempt – reached levels of barbarity far in excess of what had taken place in Germany or Austria. Moreover, the more or less free hand given to Party and police, untrammelled by legal restraints or worries about 'public opinion', provided wide scope for autonomous individual 'initiatives' in the 'Jewish Question'.

Before considering the debate about whether the 'Final Solution' was instigated by a single, comprehensive 'Führer Order', and when such an order might have been given, it seems important to glance briefly at the process of radicalization as it gathered momentum between 1939 and 1941.⁵²

50 *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Pt. I, vol. 6, p. 182, entry of 11 Nov. 1938.

51 Schleunes, p. 236.

52 An outstanding analysis of the way the complex developments in anti-Jewish policy were interwoven with Nazi resettlement plans, relating both to ethnic Germans and to the subjugated people of the conquered areas of eastern Europe, is provided by Götz Aly, *'Final Solution': Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews* (London, 1999), first published in German as *'Endlösung': Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995).

An administrative decree of 21 September 1939, in which Heydrich laid down the general lines of Jewish persecution in Poland, distinguished between a long-term 'final aim' or 'planned overall measures' – not further elucidated and to remain strictly secret – and short-term 'preliminary measures' with the intention of concentrating the Jews in larger cities around railway junctions.⁵³ It would be mistaken to draw the conclusion that the vaguely indicated 'final aim' meant the programmed annihilation of the actual 'Final Solution' which later evolved. Clearly, however, the operative part of the decree related to the provisional concentration of Jews for further transportation. On Himmler's order a few weeks later, on 30 October, all Jews in the western part of Poland, now called the Warthegau and annexed to the Reich, were to be deported into the so-called *Generalgouvernement* – the core of German-occupied Poland under the governorship of Hans Frank – in order to make housing and jobs available for the Germans to be settled there. Hans Frank had accordingly to be prepared to receive several hundred thousand deported Jews and Poles from the Warthegau.⁵⁴ The policy of forced expulsion led unavoidably to the establishment of ghettos – the first of which was erected at Łódź (Litzmannstadt) in December 1939. Almost at the same time, compulsory labour was introduced for all Jews in the *Generalgouvernement*. The twin steps of ghettoization and forced labour provided part of the momentum which was later to culminate in the 'Final Solution'.⁵⁵ For the present, it was presumed that the deportations from the annexed areas would bring about the rapid end of the 'Jewish Question' there, and that in the *Generalgouvernement* those Jews (including women and children) incapable of work should be confined to ghettos, and Jews available for hard labour should be assigned to forced labour camps. This decision, taken at a meeting of top SS leaders in January 1940, and accepting the inevitable deaths of thousands through exhaustion, hunger, and disease, marks a point at which 'the murderous anti-semitic idea, previously existing in a general, abstract form, began to take the shape of a concrete project. The decision to murder millions had at this point still not been taken. But in thought and practice a step in that direction had been taken'.⁵⁶

In early 1940 there were still substantial differences of opinion on finding a 'solution to the Jewish Question', and there was no sign of any clear or comprehensive programme. Obviously not anticipating an early 'solution', Hans Frank indicated in a speech in March that the Reich could not be rendered 'free of Jews' during the war.⁵⁷ A few months later, Frank was faced with a demand to receive quarter of a million inhabitants of the

53 Peter Longerich, ed., *Die Ermordung der europäischen Juden. Eine umfassende Dokumentation des Holocaust 1941–1945* (Munich, 1989), pp. 47–8.

54 Kurt Pätzold, ed., *Verfolgung, Vertreibung Vernichtung. Dokumente des faschistischen Antisemitismus 1933 bis 1942* (Leipzig, 1983), pp. 239–40.

55 Pätzold, 'Vertreibung', pp. 196–7; Mommsen, 'Realisierung', p. 406.

56 Pätzold, 'Vertreibung', p. 196.

57 Werner Präg and Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, eds., *Das Diensttagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneurs in Polen 1939–1945* (Stuttgart, 1975), p. 147 (entry of 4 March 1940).

Łódź ghetto, whom Gauleiter Greiser of the Warthegau wanted to be rid of from his domains. Frank refused, at which one of Greiser's team declared ominously that the 'Jewish Question, would have to be solved in some sort of way'.⁵⁸

'Jewish policy' in mid 1940 – by which time West European Jews had also fallen into German hands and the real possibility of an overall European 'solution' had arisen – was still in a state of confusion. Eichmann still nurtured ideas of a comprehensive programme of emigration to Palestine.⁵⁹ Attempts to further the emigration of Jews from Germany itself (mainly via Spain and Portugal) continued to be promoted well into 1941.⁶⁰ However, arbitrary deportation of Jews from eastern areas of the Reich into the *Generalgouvernement* was banned by Göring in March 1940, after Hans Frank had refused to accept any further deportees.⁶¹ And for the 'eastern Jews' – by far the majority under German rule – emigration was in any case not an option. In June 1940 Heydrich informed Foreign Minister Ribbentrop that the 'overall problem' of the approximately three and a quarter million Jews in German-ruled territory could 'no longer be solved through emigration' and that 'a territorial solution' was therefore necessary.⁶² Jewish representatives were told that a reservation in an as yet undefined colonial territory was what the government had in mind.⁶³ A few days earlier Franz Rademacher, head of the Jewish desk of the Foreign Office, had presented plans to create the reservation in Madagascar – a suggestion apparently approved by Himmler, mentioned by Hitler in talks with Mussolini and Ciano that same month, and finally laid to rest only at the start of 1942.⁶⁴ The reservation plans were certainly taken seriously for a while, and in the light of recent research cannot be regarded as simply a camouflage for the early stages of the 'Final Solution' itself – though undoubtedly any reservation plan would have led to physical extermination, amounting to genocide by a different route.⁶⁵

Towards the end of 1940 there was no end of the Jewish ghettos in Poland apparent in the foreseeable future. At the same time, the condition of the inhabitants was worsening daily, and coming to resemble the appalling caricature of Jewish existence portrayed in the nauseating propaganda film of 1940, *The Eternal Jew*.⁶⁶ From the point of view of the Nazi

58 *Das Diensttagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneurs*, p. 264 (entry for 31 July 1940).

59 Mommsen, 'Realisierung', p. 407.

60 Pätzold, 'Vertreibung', pp. 199–200; Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office* (New York, 1978), pp. 44; Helmut Krausnick et al., *The Anatomy of the SS State* (London, 1968), p. 67.

61 Browning, *Final Solution*, p. 46; Mommsen, 'Realisierung', p. 407; Pätzold, *Verfolgung*, p. 262.

62 Pätzold, 'Vertreibung', p. 201.

63 Mommsen, 'Realisierung', p. 407.

64 Browning, *Final Solution*, pp. 38, 79.

65 Mommsen, 'Realisierung', pp. 395 note 52, 408; Pätzold, 'Vertreibung', p. 206.

66 See David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933–1945* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 292 ff. and, for the best analysis of the film, Stig Hornshøj-Møller, 'Der ewige Jude'. *Quellenkritische Analyse eines antisemitischen Propagandafilms* (Göttingen, 1995).

overlords, the acute problems of hygiene, food provision, accommodation, and administration attached to the ghettos called out for 'a relief from the burden and a solution'. Possible ways out were already being mooted: in March 1941 Victor Brack, a leading official in the Führer Chancellery who had been in charge of the so-called 'Euthanasia Action' which had liquidated over 70,000 mental patients and others in Germany between 1939 and 1941, proposed methods for sterilization between 3,000 and 4,000 Jews a day.⁶⁷

By this time, spring 1941, the Nazi and military leadership were fully engaged in the preparations for the invasion of (and expected rapid Blitzkrieg victory over) the Soviet Union. In the war against the Bolshevik arch-enemy, the 'Jewish problem' was to enter a new dimension – the last phase before the actual 'Final Solution'. The mass shootings of Russian Jews by the SS-*Einsatzgruppen* marked a radicalization of anti-Jewish policy, which Christopher Browning justifiably labelled 'a quantum jump'.⁶⁸ This brings us back to our central concern of Hitler's personal role in the genesis of the 'Final Solution'.

The inadequacy of the sources, reflecting in good measure the secrecy of the killing operations and the deliberate unclarity of the language employed to refer to them, has led to historians drawing widely varying conclusions from the same evidence about the timing and the nature of the decision or decisions to exterminate the Jews. Eberhard Jäckel hints in one place that a Hitler order for the extermination of the European Jews might have been given as early as summer 1940 – on the basis of a source, which he himself admits is not a good one (the memoirs of Himmler's masseur and *confidant* Felix Kersten). However, he adjudges spring 1941 to be the period when the first key decisions were taken, in the context of preparations for the Russian campaign, with further decisions extending the killing to German Jews at the end of September, then to Polish Jews, and finally (probably in November) to all European Jews.⁶⁹ Richard Breitman takes the view that by early 1941 'Hitler had already made a fundamental decision to exterminate the Jews'.⁷⁰ Helmut Krausnick writes of a 'secret decree . . . that the Jews should be eliminated' being issued by Hitler not later than March 1941, in the context of the directives to shoot the political commissars of the Red Army.⁷¹ Andreas Hillgruber points to a verbal order of Hitler to either Himmler or Heydrich by at the latest May 1941 for the systematic liquidation of Russian Jews, and implies the issuing of

67 Pätzold, 'Vertreibung', p. 204.

68 Browning, *Final Solution*, p. 8.

69 Eberhard Jäckel, 'Hitler und der Mord an den europäischen Juden' in Peter Märthesheimer and Ivo Frenzel, eds., *Im Kreuzfeuer: Der Fernsehfilm 'Holocaust'. Eine Nation ist betroffen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1979), pp. 151–62, here p. 156; Jäckel, *Hitler in History*, pp. 51 ff; Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's Herrschaft* (Stuttgart, 2nd edn., 1988) pp. 99 ff, 120 and Eberhard Jäckel and Jürgen Rohwer, *Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1985), pp. 9–17, 190–1.

70 Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (London, 1991), p. 153.

71 Krausnick, *Anatomy*, p. 60 (and see also p. 68).

an order extending this to all European Jews before the end of July 1941, when Heydrich received from Göring the commission to undertake preparations for 'a total solution of the Jewish Question' in the German sphere of influence and to submit an overall plan of measures necessary 'for the accomplishment of the final solution of the Jewish question which we desire'.⁷² Most leading accounts (for instance of Reitlinger, Hilberg, Dawidowicz, and Fleming) concur in indicating a decision by Hitler to implement the 'Final Solution' during the spring or more likely the summer of 1941, and seeing this incorporated in the Göring mandate of 31 July.⁷³ Christopher Browning, too, emphasizes the centrality of Göring's order as reflecting a decision which Hitler has taken in the summer to extend the killing to all European Jews. However, he relativizes Hitler's decision by seeing it more in the shape of a prompting initiative rather than a clear directive, which the Führer approved and sanctioned in October or November,⁷⁴ Adam argues for a decision by Hitler in the autumn rather than the summer, at a time when the German advance in Russia had halted and vague ideas of a 'territorial solution' east of the Urals had obviously become totally illusory.⁷⁵ A more radical position is adopted by Broszat, Mommsen, and Streit, who reject altogether the existence of a single, specific, and comprehensive 'Führer Order' – written or verbal – and place the emphasis upon the cumulative 'sanctioning' of *de facto* extermination, initiated by other agencies and wildly escalating, between the summer of 1941 and early 1942, out of which the 'Final Solution' proper – the systematic gassing in the extermination camps – 'evolved'.⁷⁶ A similar interpretation seems implicitly offered by Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm at the end of an exhaustive study of the *Einsatzgruppen*, when he writes of a

Hitler decision in the summer of 1941, but only relating to 'eastern Jews', with gradual later extension and radicalization, though not without Hitler's express agreement.⁷⁷ Some studies support the case for a later date – at the earliest by the late summer or autumn of 1941 – for the shift into all-out genocide, while reaching quite different conclusions about Hitler's role. Arno Mayer sees the threshold to systematic mass murder crossed only once the Nazi 'crusade' against Bolshevism ran into difficulties, broadly beginning around September 1941. Even at the Wannsee Conference of 20 January 1942, the Nazis were, in Mayer's view, still only feeling their way towards the 'Final Solution'.⁷⁸ Hitler plays no specific role in Mayer's treatment, in contrast to that of the Swiss historian Philippe Burrin, who places Hitler at the centre of his interpretation while according full weight to the circumstances in which the push for a territorial solution was transformed into systematic genocide. In Burrin's analysis, the increasing difficulties of 'Operational Barbarossa' are again seen as the spur to the lurch into genocide – a move he dates to around mid August in the Soviet Union, extended to the whole of European Jewry about a month later by Hitler's reversal of his earlier position that Jews could only be deported to the east following the defeat of the Soviet Union. More recent studies have tended to look to distinct phases of racialization rather than to one comprehensive decision, and have increasingly come to date the extension to all-out genocide no earlier than autumn 1941. Götz Aly, for instance, points to 'clear leaps in development (*deutliche Entwicklungssprünge*)' in March, July, and October 1941.⁸⁰ But in a striking – and controversial – reassessment, Christian Gerlach goes so far as to pinpoint a 'basic decision (*Grundsatzentscheidung*)' by Hitler, extending the killing of the Jews already raging in the east to the whole of European Jewry, to a meeting of his Gauleiter on 12 December 1941, the day after Germany's declaration of war on the USA.⁸¹ Peter Longrich, on the other hand, rejects the elusive search for a single decision (and thus also Gerlach's

72 Andreas Hillgruber, 'Die ideologisch-dogmatische Grundlage der nationalsozialistischen Politik der Ausrottung der Juden in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion und ihre Durchführung 1941–44', *German Studies Review* 2 (1979), pp. 264–96, here p. 273, and also pp. 277–8; Andreas Hillgruber, 'Die "Endlösung" und das deutsche Ostempireum als Kernstück des rassenideologischen Programms des Nationalsozialismus', in Funke (see ch. 3 note 27), pp. 94–114, here pp. 103–5. The text of Göring's order is in Hans Buchheim *et al.*, *Anatomie des SS-Staates* (Oleum/Freiburg, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 372–3.

73 Reitlinger, pp. 82–6; Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New Viewpoints edn, New York, 1973), pp. 177, 257, 262; Dawidowicz, *War*, p. 169; Fleming, p. 59. Hilberg has more recently been inclined to date the Hitler order to the two weeks or so immediately following the Göring mandate. See Jäckel and Rohwer (see ref. in note 66 this chapter), pp. 125–6, 137–8.

74 Browning, *Final Solution*, p. 8, and Christopher Browning, 'Zur Genesis der "Endlösung"', in note 66 this chapter), pp. 125–6, 137–8.

75 Adam, *Judenpolitik*, pp. 312–13. A similar date is favoured in a recent article by Shlomo Aronson, 'Die dreifache Falle. Hitler's Judenpolitik, die Alliierten und die Juden', *VZ* 32 (1984), pp. 51–2.

76 Broszat, 'Genesis', pp. 753 note 26, 763 ff.; Mommsen, 'Realisierung', pp. 416 and note 148, 417; Christian Streit, review of Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges. Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und*

77 Krausnick and Wilhelm, pp. 634–5. The decision-making process in the 'Final Solution' was the subject of a major international conference at Stuttgart in 1984, at which all interpretations were discussed. See Jäckel and Rohwer (ref. in note 69 this chapter).

78 Mayer (see ref. in note 31, this chapter), chs. 8–9.

79 Burrin (see ref. in note 31, this chapter), chs. 4–5.

80 Aly, 'Final Solution', pp. 258–9 ('*Endlösung*', p. 398).

81 Christian Gerlach, 'Die Wannsee-Konferenz, das Schicksal der deutschen Juden und Hitlers politische Grundsatzencheidung, alle Juden Europas zu ermorden', *Werkstattsgeschichte*, 18 (1997), pp. 7–44. The essay is reprinted, with some amendments, in Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord. Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, 1998), pp. 85–166. The same volume contains (pp. 264 ff.) Gerlach's replies to criticism levelled at his arguments.

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precise dating), to instigate the 'Final Solution'. Rather, he views the programme to exterminate the Jews of Europe as the culmination, reached only during spring and summer of 1942, of a number of stages of escalation, all bearing genocidal intent.⁸²

As these varied interpretations of leading experts demonstrate, the evidence for the precise nature of a decision to implement the 'Final Solution', for its timing, and even for the very existence of such a decision is circumstantial. Though second-rank SS leaders repeatedly referred in post-war trials to a 'Führer Order' or 'Commission', no direct witness of such an order survived the war. And for all the brutality of his own statements, there is no record of Hitler speaking categorically even in his close circle of a decision he had taken to kill the Jews – though his remarks leave not the slightest doubt of his approval, broad knowledge, and acceptance of the 'glory' for what was being done in his name.⁸³ Interpretation rests, therefore, on the 'balance of probabilities'.⁸⁴ We need briefly to consider the evidence in this light.

Hitler did not need to issue directives or take clear initiatives in order to promote the process of radicalization in the 'Jewish Question' between 1939 and 1941. Rather, as we have seen, the momentum was largely stimulated by a combination of bureaucratic measures emanating from the Reich Security Head Office (whose administrative consequences were not clearly envisaged), and *ad hoc* initiatives taken 'on the ground' by individuals and agencies responsible for coping with an increasingly unmanageable task. Typical of Hitler's stance was his wish, expressed towards the end of 1940, that his Gauleiter in the East should be accorded the 'necessary freedom of movement', to accomplish their difficult task, that he would demand from his Gauleiter *after 10 years* only the single announcement that their territories were purely German, and would not enquire about the methods used to bring this about.⁸⁵ His own direct role was largely confined to the propaganda arena – to public tirades of hatred and dire but vague prognostications about the fate of the Jews. The most notorious of these is his Reichstag speech of 30 January 1939, when he 'prophesied' that the war would bring about the 'annihilation (*Vernichtung*) of the Jewish race in Europe' – a prophecy to which he made frequent reference in the years to come, and which he significantly post-dated to 1 September 1939, the day of the outbreak of war.⁸⁶ This itself reflected Hitler's mental merger of the

82 Longerich, *Politik*, esp. pp. 468–72, 476, 513–16, 581–6.

83 See Mommsen, 'Realisierung', pp. 391 ff. It is uncertain whether and how far Hitler was directly informed about the actual details of the killings in the East (see p. 409 and note 117), even though directives had been given to keep him in the picture regarding the 'progress' of the *Einsatzgruppen* (see Fleming, p. 123; Krausnick and Wilhelm, p. 335). For Hitler's public references to the 'Final Solution', see Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, pp. 243–4.

84 Broszat, 'Genesis', p. 753; Browning, 'Zur Genesis', pp. 98, 105, 109.

85 Cited in Krausnick and Wilhelm, pp. 626–7.

86 Hillgruber, 'Die ideologisch-dogmatische Grundlage', pp. 271, 285 ff.; Jäckel, 'Hitler und der Mord', pp. 160–2.

war and his 'mission' to destroy the Jews, which reached its fateful point of convergence in the conception of the 'war of annihilation' against the Soviet Union.⁸⁷

The barbarous preparations for the attack on the Soviet Union, which implicated the *Wehrmacht*, too, in the series of criminal directives associated with the *Kommissarbefehl* – the ordered shooting of political commissars in the Soviet army – included briefings of the leader of the *Einsatzgruppen*, and their subunits the *Einsatzkommandos*, by Heydrich on the role they were to play in the wake of the advancing army. A number of *Einsatzkommandoleaders* claimed after the war that it was during these briefings that they heard of the Führer order to exterminate the Russian Jews.⁸⁸ Most historians have accepted that some blanket empowering directive from Hitler to kill the Russian Jews lay behind Heydrich's verbal instructions, and that Heydrich's more limited written order to the Higher SS and Police Leaders in the Soviet Union of 2 July 1941 targeting the liquidation of 'radical elements' in the conquered population, among them 'Jews in party and state positions' was aimed at giving some sort of justification to the *Wehrmacht* or other authorities for the mass shootings.⁸⁹ Certainly the *Einsatzgruppen* killings were from the beginning far from confined to those in party and state offices. Already on 3 July, for example, the head of the *Einsatzkommando* in Lutz had around 1,160 Jewish men shot in order, as he said, to put his stamp on the town.⁹⁰ The death-squads of *Einsatzgruppe A* in the Baltic placed a particularly liberal interpretation on their mandate.⁹¹ The *Einsatzgruppen* ultimately came to make a major contribution to the murder of in all over two million Russian Jews; *Einsatzgruppe A* alone reported the 'execution' of 229,052 Jews by the beginning of January 1942.⁹² Their detailed monthly 'reports of events' belong to the most horrific surviving relics of the Third Reich.

The vast numbers of Russian Jews massacred speaks plainly in favour of a general commission from above, rather than simply local initiatives on the part of trigger-happy units of the *Einsatzgruppen*.⁹³ At the same

87 See esp. Hillgruber's essays on this point, references note 72 this chapter.

88 Alfred Streim, *Die Behandlung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener im 'Fall Barbarossa'* (Heidelberg/Karlsruhe, 1981), pp. 74–80.

89 Krausnick, *Anatomy*, pp. 60–4; Krausnick and Wilhelm, pp. 150 ff., 634; Hillgruber, 'Die ideologisch-dogmatische Grundlage', p. 243; Heinz Höhne, *The Order of the Death's Head* (Pan Books edn, London, 1972), pp. 329–30. For controversy about the nature of the orders given to the *Einsatzgruppen*, see Browning, *Fateful Months*, pp. 17–20. The text of the order of 2 July 1941 can be found in Peter Longerich, ed., *Die Ermordung der europäischen Juden* (Munich, 1989), pp. 116–18.

90 Streim, p. 89 note 333.

91 Burin, pp. 122–3.

92 Krausnick, *Anatomy*, p. 64; Krausnick and Wilhelm, p. 619. Wilhelm's conservative estimate of the total number of murdered Russian Jews, on the basis of the most exhaustive analysis possible of incomplete evidence, is 2.2 million (Krausnick and Wilhelm, pp. 618–22). The large proportion of these killed specifically by the *Einsatzgruppen* cannot be precisely determined.

93 Krausnick and Wilhelm, p. 634.

time, there was in the early stages of the invasion evidently a lack of clarity among the heads of the *Einsatzgruppen* and other leaders of SS, Party, and police in the eastern occupied territory about the precise scope of their task and about the nature of any long-term solution to the 'Jewish problem'. It seems likely that during the various pre-invasion briefings of the *Einsatzgruppen* there had been talk of exterminating the Jews in the Russian territories to which they were about to be sent, but that such talk was couched in ambiguous terms capable of being understood in different ways.⁹⁴ At any rate, the evidence assembled by Alfred Steim and extended in Philippe Burrin's analysis is hard to reconcile with the transmission of a specific Führer order for the extermination of Russian Jewry *before* the beginning of 'Operation Barbarossa' and suggests that the killing instructions to the *Einsatzgruppen* were initially limited, probably indeed along the lines of Heydrich's directive of 2 July 1941.

The early post-war court testimony of *Einsatzkommando* leaders about the prior existence of a Führer order has been shown to be demonstrably false, concocted to provide a unified defence of the leader of *Einsatzgruppe D*, Otto Ohlendorf, at his trial in 1947.⁹⁵ More reliable subsequent testimony by those directly involved has indicated with a high degree of plausibility that there was no knowledge of a general liquidation order before the march into the Soviet Union, and that such a mandate was provided only several weeks after the beginning of the Russian campaign.⁹⁶ There was little logic, as Streim has pointed out, in trying to stir up the local population to unleash pogroms against the Jews (which had been part of Heydrich's verbal briefings) had a general extermination order already been in existence. Moreover, at the beginning of 'Barbarossa' the guidelines of Heydrich's written order of 2 July were for the most part *broadly* adhered to.⁹⁷ Compared with the scale of the killing from around mid August onwards, the numbers shot by units of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the first weeks after the invasion were *relatively* small and overwhelmingly confined to male Jews. For example, the exceptionally brutal *Einsatzkommando 3* operating in Lithuania killed 4,239 Jews, of which 135 were women, during the month of July 1941. In August, this rose to 37,186 killed, as many as 32,430 of them after the middle of the month, while in September the victims totalled 56,459, including 26,243 women and 15,112 children. The actual practice of the *Einsatzgruppen* corresponds, therefore, to the significant indicators of post-war testimony and to a number of pieces of documentary evidence that the 'Führer order' was transmitted to the *Einsatzkommandos* sometime during the month of August.⁹⁹ However,

94 Krausnick and Wilhelm, p. 627; Streim, pp. 88–9.

95 Streim, p. 80.

96 Streim, p. 83.

97 Streim, p. 84.

98 Burrin, pp. 124–5; see also p. 128.

99 Streim, pp. 85–6.

the mandate to extend the killing now to all Jews irrespective of gender and age – with its notorious culmination in the mass shooting of 33,771 Jewish men, women, and children at Babi-Yar near Kiev on 29–30 September 1941 – was not, it seems, given at a specific time in a single centralized meeting addressed by Heydrich or Himmler. Rather, it seems to have been conveyed by Himmler in discussions with the Higher Police and SS-Leaders in the eastern territories, passed by them to the leaders of the *Einsatzgruppen*, and further transmitted in individual briefings of the heads of the *Einsatzkommandos*.¹⁰⁰ That the extension of the killing in August 1941 had Hitler's approval seems unquestionable. The nature and form of the 'Führer order', and whether it amounted to an initiative by Hitler himself or was any more than the granting of approval to a suggestion – itself, in all probability, emanating from the local commanders of the killing units and broadened into a wider remit – by Heydrich or Himmler, is impossible to establish.

A hint that the possibility was being mooted, even before the *Einsatzgruppen* had begun their massacres of Russian Jews, of a 'solution' involving all European Jews is given in Eichmann's circular of 20 May 1941, advising of Göring's ban on Jewish emigration from France and Belgium (in order not to block any further possible emigration of German Jews) and mentioning the imminent proximity of the 'Final Solution of the Jewish problem' which was 'doubtless to come'.¹⁰¹ It was, however, over two months later, after the death-squads had been rampaging in the Soviet Union for almost six weeks, that Heydrich received an order from Göring to prepare for 'a total solution of the Jewish question'.¹⁰² As we noted earlier, this authorization, initiated by Heydrich and drafted for him by Eichmann for Göring's signature in the context of the expected imminent victory over the Soviet Union,¹⁰³ has frequently been interpreted as giving voice to a Hitler directive marking *the* order for the 'Final Solution'. This interpretation seems unconvincing.

Whether Hitler was directly consulted about the Göring order to Heydrich is itself doubtful. Since the order technically amounted to no more than an extension of the authority which Heydrich had been granted by Göring in 1939, Hitler's further approval was not strictly necessary.¹⁰⁴ In any case, as Burrin has convincingly argued, it seems almost certain that

100 Streim, pp. 89–93. The extension of the killing was accompanied by a huge increase in the summer of 1941 in the manpower attached to the security police units operating in the east. See Yohoshua Büchler, 'Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS: Himmler's Personal Murder Brigades in 1941', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (1986), pp. 11–26, and Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 100–6.

101 Pätzold, *Verfolgung*, pp. 288–9; Krausnick, *Anatomy*, p. 67; Reitlinger, p. 84; Fleming, p. 57.

102 Longerich, *Ermordung*, p. 78; Reitlinger, p. 85.

103 See Jäckel and Ruhwer, p. 15.

104 See Mommsen's comments on the Göring order, 'Realisierung', pp. 409 and 417 note 149; and Browning, 'Zur Genesis', p. 105 and *Fateful Months*, pp. 22.

this order did *not* mark the shift to all-out genocide, but still formed part of the intention to bring about a comprehensive territorial 'solution' once the war in the east was over.¹⁰⁵ At the end of July 1941, victory over the USSR seemed a matter of weeks rather than months away, and Heydrich was doubtless keen to establish beyond question his authority in the administration of the 'Jewish Question', which had initially derived from the mandate Göring had given him on 24 January 1939. For his part, Hitler still adhered throughout August 1941 to the view that Jews would be deported to the east only after the end of the Russian campaign.¹⁰⁶ In mid September, Hitler then changed his mind and ordered the earliest possible deportation of Jews from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. The reasons for the *volte face* are unclear. Demands were certainly being made by Rosenberg among others to deport Jews to the east. And Hitler seems to have been gloomy around this time about the slowing advance in the east, with the mounting possibility of a prolonged struggle. He reverted in his inner circle in precisely these weeks to the lessons to be drawn from Germany's defeat in 1918 and the need to destroy the 'elements' which had undermined Germany's chance of victory in the First World War.¹⁰⁷ And by September of course, as we have noted, full-scale genocide had already been embarked upon by the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Soviet Union. The case, then, for a linkage between the physical extermination which was already comprehensively taking place in the east, the inability to bring about a territorial solution in the foreseeable future, and the mandate which Heydrich had already obtained to organize an overall solution to the 'Jewish problem' in all areas under German occupation was by September 1941 becoming a compelling one. Even so, a comprehensive programme of extermination for the whole of European Jewry had not yet fully emerged.

The summer and autumn of 1941 were characterized by a high degree of confusion and contradictory interpretations of the aims of anti-Jewish policy by the Nazi authorities. It was a period of experimentation and resort to 'self-help' and 'local initiatives' in liquidating Jews, particularly once the transportations from the Reich and from the west of Europe had (in this case clearly on Hitler's orders) started rolling eastwards in autumn 1941, persuading Nazi bosses in Poland and Russia to adopt radical *ad hoc* measures – liquidation – to cope with the countless numbers of Jews from the west pouring into their domain and randomly deposited on their doorsteps.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile the killing process was escalating rapidly – and not just in the 'Jewish Question'. Christian Streit has demonstrated how the *Wehrmacht* willingly collaborated in the multiplying barbarity of the 'war of annihilation' through its close co-operation with the *Einsatzgruppen* and

105 Burrin, pp. 129–31.

106 Burrin, pp. 137–8.

107 Burrin, pp. 138–9, 164–5, 168–9, 173–4.

108 Broszat, 'Genesis', pp. 750 ff.; see also Mommsen, 'Realisierung', pp. 410–12.

by its direct involvement in the liquidation of almost two-thirds of the Soviet prisoners-of-war to fall into German hands.¹⁰⁹ It was initially to house Soviet captives that the then small concentration camp at Auschwitz was expanded, and the first experiments with the gas chambers there had as their victims not Jews but Soviet war prisoners.

The confusion, contradictions, and improvisations of the summer and autumn 1941 are, however, compatible with a gradual – though steep – descent into the full-scale genocidal programme known to history as the 'Final Solution', which fully emerged only in spring 1942, in the weeks following the Wannsee conference. Rudolf Höss (the Commandant of Auschwitz), it is true, recalled after the war receiving the extermination order from Himmler in the summer of 1941. But Höss's testimony cannot be relied upon, and in this case much points to the conclusion that he has erroneously pre-dated events by a year and was really referring to the summer of 1942.¹¹⁰ Eichmann's testimony in Israel in 1960 was also at times inaccurate. He claimed to remember vividly Heydrich communicating to him two or three months after the invasion of the Soviet Union that 'the Führer has ordered the physical extermination of the Jews'.¹¹¹ But his memory was frequently wayward when it came to precise dates and times. In this case, too, it is as well not to build too much on such dubious evidence.¹¹²

Browning concludes from this confused evidence that Hitler approved in late October or November 'the extermination plan he had solicited the previous summer'.¹¹³ Burrin's interpretation, from the same evidence, is that the Führer order to kill the Jews of Europe was given about September 1941, and was probably synonymous with the order to deport the Jews to the east.¹¹⁴ Gerlach provides good grounds, however, for believing that these dates for a Führer order are premature.

The uncertainties registered during the autumn by some Nazi leaders in the east – such as Reich Commissar for the Eastern Region (*Ostland*) Hinrich Lohse in Riga and General Commissar für Belorussia (*Weißruthenien*)

109 Streit, *Keine Kameraden* (see note 70 this chapter); see the review of Streit's book by Hans Mommsen, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, London 1 (1979), pp. 17–23. On the behaviour of the German troops on the eastern fronts, see esp. Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (London, 1985); and Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army* (Oxford, 1991).

110 Burrin, p. 193 note 15.

111 Jochen von Lang, *Das Eichmann-Protokoll, Tonbandaufzeichnungen der israelischen Verhöre* (Berlin, 1982), p. 69.

112 See Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*, pp. 270–2. The outstanding study of Eichmann's role in the 'Final Solution' is that of Hans Safrian, *Eichmann und seine Gehilfen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995).

113 Browning, 'Zur Genesis', p. 107. See also the balanced account of Wolfgang Scheffler, 'Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der "Endlösung"', *APZ* (30 October 1982), pp. 3–10.

114 Burrin, pp. 139–41. The best analysis of the background to the deportation order of September 1941 is now Peter Witte, 'Two Decisions concerning the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question": Deportations to Łódź and Mass Murder in Chelmno', in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9 (1995), pp. 293–317.

Wilhelm Kube in Minsk – about the mass liquidation of Jews arriving in their areas from the Reich, and the inconsistencies in Nazi barbarity during these weeks, do not suggest that a central, comprehensive decision to exterminate the Jews of Europe had already been taken. Lohse and Kube were far from alone in seeking clarification from the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (the *Ostministerium*) and the Reich Security Head Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA) about whether deported Reich Jews – Kube viewed the Jews from his own ‘cultural sphere (*Kulturkreis*)’ as different from the ‘native brutish hordes (*bodenständigen vertierten Horden*)’ in the conquered eastern territories – were to be killed,¹¹⁵ and if so whether exceptions were to be made for ‘*Mischlinge*’ (part-Jews), Jews with war decorations, or Jews with ‘aryan’ partners. The unease about such issues, leading to numerous protests reaching the Eastern Ministry and RSHA, prompted Himmler, on 30 November 1941, to prohibit the liquidation of a transport of 1,000 Jews to Riga from Berlin. The order came too late: the Jews had been shot on arrival, as had two transports of Jews from Germany and Austria to Kovno in Lithuania a few days earlier.¹¹⁶ With the Nazi authorities incapable of coping with the problems – which they had, of course, created for themselves – of housing and feeding the deported Jews, and with a plainly genocidal policy operating in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union, killing the Jews deported into their areas was increasingly seen by local police chiefs and party leaders as the solution.

Some developed local extermination programmes: the beginning of construction in November of the extermination camp in Belzec in the Lublin District in the General Government (the province of SS Police Chief Odilo Globocnik) started out as one such initiative.¹¹⁷ Another was the killing of Jews in gas vans at the beginning of December at Chelmno in the ‘Warthegau’ – the large tract of western Poland now annexed to the Reich – the domain of Gauleiter Arthur Greiser and Police Chief Wilhelm Koppe.¹¹⁸ These local genocides, however, did not yet form part of a comprehensive programme: by the beginning of December 1941, then, Nazi anti-Jewish policy was still evolving, still transitional. The step into outright genocide had been taken in some areas, though there was as yet no co-ordinating programme to link together the various killing actions.

Broadly, the position was as follows. The overall aim of the RSHA appears still to have been a mass deportation of Jews ‘to the east’ (meaning to the inhospitable regions of the former territory of the Soviet Union),

115 Cited in Gerlach, ‘Wannsee-Konferenz’, p. 17.

116 Gerlach, ‘Wannsee-Konferenz’, pp. 12–13.

117 See Dieter Pohl, *Von der ‘Judenpolitik’ zum Judenmord. Der Distrikt Lublin des Generalgouvernements 1939–1944*, Frankfurt am Main, 1993, pp. 105 ff.; Adalbert Rückerl, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungslager im Spiegel deutscher Strafprozesse*, p. 106 ff., 132 ff.

118 See Ian Kershaw, ‘Improvised Genocide? The Emergence of the “Final Solution” in the “Warthegau”’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, 1992, pp. 51–78; Rückerl, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungslager*, pp. 253 ff.

where those capable of work would have died of exhaustion, cold, starvation, and disease, while those incapable of working would have immediately been liquidated.¹¹⁹ Such a ‘territorial solution’ to the ‘Jewish Question’ – itself outrightly genocidal – had been vitiated by the inability of the German army to attain rapid victory over the USSR. Nevertheless, Jews from the Reich were now being deported to the east, despite the continuation of the war and the absence of any territory that might serve as a ‘Jewish reservation’. Meanwhile, the *Einsatzgruppen* and their sub-units had been slaughtering Jews in their tens of thousands for months in the former territories of the Soviet Union, and Nazi leaders in some areas of the east were increasingly resorting to ‘self-help’ and developing their own killing programmes. Despite the evident escalation of genocidal actions, there was still a lack of clarity about the treatment of the deported Reich Jews and a need to define any possible exclusions from the deportation programme and liquidation actions.

The need to provide co-ordination and clarification of the deportation programme, particularly concerning the Reich Jews, was the basis of Reinhard Heydrich’s invitation, issued on 29 November 1941, to a meeting of state secretaries from government ministries, along with representatives of the RSHA and other agencies directly concerned, to take place at the Wannsee, in the west of Berlin, on 9 December. In the event, the meeting was postponed – almost certainly on account both of the implications of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December and the opening of the Red Army’s major counter-offensive two days earlier, with its inevitable drastic effect on Heydrich’s large-scale deportation plans.¹²⁰ According to Gerlach’s interpretation, by the time the Wannsee Conference was reconstituted, on 20 January 1942, the crucial step in the transition to a comprehensive programme of genocide had taken place; by then, Hitler had given his ‘basic decision’ to kill all the Jews of Europe.

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor – which prompted Hitler in his Reichstag speech on 11 December to announce the German declaration of war on the USA – the war was indeed now a ‘world war’ – a term

119 Permission had been granted in October 1941 to the Reich Commissar for the Ostland, Hinrich Lohse, to liquidate Jews incapable of work by carbon-monoxide gassing in extermination vans devised by Viktor Brack of the Chancellery of the Führer, who had developed the gassing techniques while head of the ‘euthanasia action’. See Krausnick, ‘Judenverfolgung’, pp. 409–12; Browning, ‘Zur Genesis’, pp. 101–2; Fleming, pp. 81–4. Plans (later abandoned) in November 1941 to erect big crematoria near Mogilew, some 200 kilometres east of Minsk, were almost certainly connected with the intention of killing Jews incapable of work who were to be transported into the region. See Aly, ‘*Endlösung*’, pp. 342–6; Christian Gerlach, ‘Failure of Plans for an SS Extermination Camp in Mogilev, Belorussia’, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 11 (1997), pp. 60–78; Jean-Claude Pressac, *Les Crématoires d’Auschwitz* (Paris, 1993), pp. 31–3 (though, as Aly, ‘*Endlösung*’, p. 344, and Gerlach, ‘Failure’, pp. 61–2, point out, Pressac is over-ready to accept the SS’s own explanation for the order of the crematoria, as needed to dispose of the bodies of typhus victims).

120 Longerich, *Politik*, p. 466.

hitherto reserved in Germany for the war of 1914–18; and Hitler, in the notorious speech he made to the Reichstag on 30 January 1939, had ‘prophesied’ that, in the event of another world war, the Jews of Europe would be annihilated.¹²¹ On 12 December 1941, the day after the war, in his view, had truly become a ‘world war’, Hitler addressed party leaders (Reichsleiter and Gauleiter), a group of around 50 persons, in his private rooms in the Reich Chancellery; among other topics, he spoke of the Jews. According to Goebbels’s summary of this part of his address, he referred to his ‘prophecy’, and to his view that the ‘annihilation of Jewry’ had to be the ‘necessary consequence’ of the fact that the ‘world war’ had arrived. In Goebbels’s chilling account, ‘the instigators of this bloody conflict will thus have to pay for it with their lives (*so werden die Urheber dieses blutigen Konflikts dafür mit ihrem Leben bezahlen müssen*)’.¹²² This amounted, according to Gerlach, to Hitler’s announcement of his decision to exterminate the Jews of Europe.¹²³

During the following days, Hitler had private meetings with a number of Nazi leaders who had a direct interest in the ‘Jewish Question’. No record survives of what was said at them, but a cryptic note in the recently discovered desk-diary of Heinrich Himmler indicates that the treatment of the Jews was discussed with Hitler at a meeting in his headquarters on the afternoon of 18 December 1941. ‘To be exterminated as partisans (*Als Partisanen auszurotten*)’ was all that was entered alongside ‘Jewish Question’, as the outcome of the meeting.¹²⁴ Interpretation is clearly not straightforward. Gerlach sees the entry not – as might at first sight be presumed – as referring to the Soviet Union, where the murder of the Jews had by this time been long in full swing, but to ‘imaginary “partisans”, the alleged “Jewish threat”’. Though accepting that the entry is unclear, it points, in Gerlach’s view, ‘to a global meaning of Hitler’s statement, which in its verbal form can only be understood as a directive’.¹²⁵

The ‘Jewish Question’ had also arisen at a discussion on 14 December, two days after his address to the Gauleiter, between Hitler and his Minister for the Eastern Territories, Alfred Rosenberg. When Rosenberg

121 Hitler had said, ‘today I will once more be a prophet: if the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevizing of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!’ Noakes and Pridham, iii.1049, Doc. 770. For the context of the speech, see Hans Mommsen, ‘Hitler’s Reichstag Speech of 30 January 1939’, *History and Memory* 9 (1997), pp. 147–61.

122 *Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Part II*, vol. 2, pp. 498–9; Gerlach, ‘Wannsee-Konferenz’, p. 25.

123 Gerlach, ‘Wannsee-Konferenz’, pp. 25–8.

124 *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42*, ed. Peter Witte u.a., Hamburg, 1999, p. 294 (where n. 60 interprets the entry in accordance with the hypothesis of Gerlach’s article – Gerlach is a co-editor of the volume – though without any indications that the hypothesis is highly speculative and controversial).

125 Cit. Gerlach, ‘Wannsee-Konferenz’, p. 22.

gave him the manuscript of a forthcoming speech to glance over – in itself a somewhat unusual occurrence – Hitler commented that the speech had been composed in the circumstances prevailing before Japan had entered the war. Rosenberg’s note on the meeting continued: ‘About the Jewish Question, I said that the comments about the New York Jews ought perhaps now, after the decision, to be somewhat altered. My standpoint was not to speak of the extermination (*Ausrottung*) of Jewry. The Führer approved this stance and said they had burdened us with the war and brought about the destruction so it was no wonder if they should be the first to feel the consequences.’¹²⁶ Gerlach sees this as another piece of evidence for Hitler’s ‘basic decision’, announced two days before his talk with Rosenberg. It is certainly additional evidence that his ‘prophecy’ about the destruction of the Jews as a consequence (as he saw it) of causing the world war was at the forefront of Hitler’s mind in these days.

As a further indication that a momentous decision had been taken by Hitler on or around 12 December, Gerlach cites the reply made by Dr Otto Bräutigam of the Eastern Ministry to a request from Hinrich Lohse, Reich Commissar for the *Ostland*, as to whether all Jews in the east, irrespective of age, sex, and economic requirements, should be liquidated: ‘The Jewish Question has probably been clarified by now through verbal discussions. Economic considerations are to be regarded as fundamentally irrelevant in the settlement of the problem.’¹²⁷

A final strand of evidence in support of a basic decision being taken by Hitler in December 1941 to kill the whole of European Jewry is found by Gerlach in the comments of Hans Frank to leading figures in the administration of the *Generalgouvernement* on 16 December, four days after Hitler’s address to his party leaders. Frank alluded to Hitler’s ‘prophecy’ (making yet a further appearance in these days), using phraseology which, based on Goebbels’ account, had been deployed by Hitler at the meeting with the Gauleiter. Frank spoke of the war as only a partial success if Jews in Europe should survive it. The Jews had to disappear, he declared. He had begun negotiations about deporting them ‘to the east’, and referred to the forthcoming Wannsee Conference to discuss the issue. ‘But what should happen to the Jews?’, he asked. ‘Do you believe they will be housed in settlement-villages in the *Ostland*? They’ve said to us in Berlin: why are you giving us all this trouble? We can’t do anything with them in the *Ostland* or in the Reich Commissariat [Ukraine]. Liquidate them yourselves!’ Frank encouraged his audience, as Hitler has done, to put all sympathy aside. ‘We must destroy (*vernichten*) the Jews wherever we meet them, and wherever it’s at all possible to do

126 *IMT*, vol. 27, p. 270 (Document PS-1517); cit. Gerlach, ‘Wannsee-Konferenz’, p. 24.

127 *IMT*, vol. 32, pp. 436–7 (Documents PS-3663 und PS-3666); Gerlach, ‘Wannsee-Konferenz’, pp. 28–9; trans. Noakes and Pridham, iii.1098, Doc. 821.

so, in order to uphold the overall structure of the Reich here,' he added.¹²⁸

Gerlach unquestionable makes a compelling case for a sharp intensification, in the immediate aftermath of Germany's declaration of war on the USA, of the drive for a comprehensive and radical genocidal solution; and the significance of December as an important juncture in the evolution of genocidal policy is heightened still further if it is recalled that the crisis that had developed on the eastern front in the advance on Moscow was at this very time approaching its climacteric. Where Gerlach is less persuasive, however, is in his claim that, in the days following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hitler arrived at – and announced to his party leaders at their meeting on 12 December – a 'basic decision'.

None of those present later referred to Hitler's meeting with his Gauleiter as carrying any special significance with regard to a solution to the 'Jewish Question', let alone singled it out as the meeting where the key decision for the 'Final Solution' had been reached.¹²⁹ The passage in Goebbels' diary – nine lines in a summary covering almost seven printed pages¹³⁰ – describing Hitler's comments on the Jews in his speech on 12 December was not highlighted in any way by the Propaganda Minister as of special importance. There was in any case little or nothing in what Hitler said that Goebbels and the others had not heard many times before. The remarks on the Jews occurred, according to the summary, around three-quarters of the way through Hitler's address. They formed, it seems, a minor section in a lengthy speech largely devoted to a commentary on the war situation, the reasons for the declaration of war on America, and bolstering the morale of Hitler's lieutenants in the party – the most important task in such meetings, which were not infrequent during the war and invariably followed important events.¹³¹ Moreover, the improbability of Hitler using this forum to announce a 'decision' to have all the Jews in Europe exterminated is magnified by the fact that the 'Final Solution', other than in the horrific but vague generalities he often made about the destruction of the Jews, remained a taboo subject in his presence, even among his immediate entourage.

128 *Das Diensttagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneurs in Polen 1939–1945*, ed. Werner Präg and Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, Stuttgart, 1975, 457. Noakes and Pridham, iii.1126–7, Doc. 848 has a translation with insignificant variations. Gerlach, 'Wannsee-Konferenz', p. 30 and n. 131, points out that Frank had had private discussions with Hitler as well as with the Ostministerium while he was in Berlin.

129 A telling point made in Ulrich Herbert's assessment of Gerlach's argument, 'Eine "Führerentscheidung" zur "Endlösung"?' *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 14–15 March 1998, pp. 69–70. Gerlach's reply to Herbert's criticism on this and other points seems to me to be unpersuasive. See Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*, pp. 280–86.

130 *Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Part II*, vol. 2, pp. 494–500; the passage on the Jews is on pp. 498–9.

131 Some of the above points have also been made in an as yet unpublished paper by Martin Moll, 'Die Tagungen der Reichs- und Gauleiter der NSDAP: Ein verkanntes Instrument der Koordinierung im "Ämterchaos" des Dritten Reiches?' pp. 29–30. I am most grateful to Dr Moll for letting me see a copy of this informative paper.

Rosenberg's note about his meeting with Hitler on 14 December is of doubtful value as evidence of a key decision by Hitler about the 'Final Solution'. His reference to changed circumstances – 'now, following the decision' – occurs in direct juxtaposition to the views he had expressed in his speech about New York Jews. Since Goebbels' account of Hitler's address to the Gauleiter on 12 December contains no references to anything resembling a 'decision', but a vital 'decision' – namely to declare war on the United States – had indeed been announced to the Reichstag on 11 December, it seems perverse to presume that this latter was not the 'decision' to which Rosenberg was alluding.¹³² Nor does Bräutigam's reply to Lohse provide evidence of a basic decision on the 'Final Solution' taken by Hitler in mid-December. Bräutigam does not mention Hitler or any other specific individual, but refers only to clarity being created 'through verbal discussions' – presumably in the *Ostministerium* or the RSHA, and not necessarily involving Hitler directly. Even Bräutigam's clarification for Lohse of basic policy guidelines did nothing to prevent continuing deliberations between the Lohse's officials and police leaders about the handling of the Jews, nor, beginning in mid-December, the halting of the killing of Jews for some months in the Reich Commissariat *Ostland*.¹³³

Hans Frank's remarks to his subordinates in the *Generalgouvernement* are certainly consonant with an extensification and radicalization of genocidal measures in December 1941. Hitler's drastic comments to his party chiefs, which Frank had heard, unquestionably served once more as a spur to outrightly murderous action. They offered what amounted to an invitation from the highest authority in the Reich to make the Jews pay with their lives in revenge for the war. Hearing Hitler's tirade in the explosive climate accompanying the drama of war against the USA and crisis on the eastern front was more than enough for party leaders to go away knowing, as on so many occasions, how to 'work towards the Führer', not needed any explicit order or directive. But there is nothing in what Frank said, appallingly brutal though his words were, to suggest that he had witnessed a key moment where the decision to kill the Jews had been announced.

Finally, the entry in Himmler's desk diary for 18 December 1941 is too terse to allow for more than speculative interpretation. It certainly links Hitler explicitly with extermination policy: it plainly shows him approving of the extirpation of Jews. But there is nothing in it which offers obvious support to Gerlach's view that it is to be equated with the actual decision for the 'Final Solution', with a decision to extend the extermination from Soviet Jewry to the Jews of the rest of Europe under the rubric of combating 'partisans'. However allergic he was to the threat of internal

132 See on this point, Longerich, *Politik*, p. 711 n. 233; and Herbert, 'Führerentscheidung'. Gerlach's reply, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*, p. 286 n. 70 strikes me as unconvincing.

133 Gerlach, 'Wannsee-Konferenz', p. 29 and n. 129.

subversion, Hitler never, as far as is known, used the term 'partisan' in connection with Jews in the Reich or in western Europe.¹³⁴ On the other hand, both he and Himmler were being made acutely aware in autumn 1941 of the scale of the 'partisan problem' in the Soviet Union.¹³⁵ The close identification of Jews with partisans, presumed by many Wehrmacht units since the early weeks of 'Operation Barbarossa', had been emphasized in September both in military guidelines and in an exhortation by Arthur Nebe, head of *Einsatzgruppe B*, in a lecture to officers from Army Group Centre.¹³⁶ It seems most likely that discussion of the 'Jewish Question' on 18 December by Hitler and Himmler took place within this context, and was aimed at liquidating the remainder of the Jews in the occupied Soviet territories under the rubric of radical action to combat the 'partisan' problem. A report presented by Himmler to Hitler at the end of 1942 on 'bandit' activity of 'partisans' in southern Russian and the Ukraine for the three months September–November 1942 shows what this could mean. Those 'executed' for their presumed connection with such activity included 363,211 Jews. Others 'executed' for the same reason totalled 14,257.¹³⁷

As the fragments of documentary evidence, whatever their ambiguities, reveal, the open genocidal intent displayed by leading Nazis in December 1941 was unmistakable. But it is also plain that there was as yet no concept of how an immense deportation and extermination programme might be carried out, with what methods, and in what timescale. Hans Frank admitted, when speaking in mid-December 1941 of the need to liquidate the Jews of the *Generalgouvernement*, that he did not know how this could be done: 'We can't shoot these 3.5 Million Jews,' he declared, 'we can't poison them, but will have somehow to take steps leading somehow to a success in annihilation (*Vernichtungserfolg*) in connection with the large-scale measures under discussion by the Reich.'¹³⁸ The last comment was a further reference to the deliberations at the forthcoming Wannsee Conference.

Gerlach suggests that the purposes of the Wannsee Conference had changed sharply during the period of its lengthy postponement between 9 December and 20 January 1942. He hints, in fact, that the very postponement – or at any rate its inordinate length – was caused by the changed

134 See Longerich, *Politik*, p. 467 and p. 712 n. 234.

135 The Soviet partisan movement, ineffective in the first months following the German invasion of the USSR, was sufficiently significant by September 1941 to persuade the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht to issue a new, brutal edict to attempt to combat the growing threat. See Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945*, (London, 1957), 2nd edn., 1981, pp. 74–6, 209. The halt of the German advance in December 1941 gave the partisan movement a boost. This was precisely around the time that Hitler and Himmler were speaking of using the partisan struggle to eradicate the Jews.

136 Hannes Heer, 'Killing Fields: the Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belorussia, 1941–1942', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11 (1997), pp. 79–101, here pp. 87, 89–90.

137 Berlin Document Center, SS-HO/1238, RFSS, 29.12.42: 'Meldungen an den Führer über Bandenbekämpfung'.

138 *Das Diensttagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneurs in Polen*, p. 458.

situation following Hitler's speech on 12 December, and the need now to prepare a full-scale extermination programme which had not been the case when initial invitations to the conference had gone out at the end of November 1941.¹³⁹ But whether the conference had undergone a fundamental change of purpose might be doubted. Rather, it seems (to follow Peter Longerich's interpretation) better to view the Wannsee Conference as taking place at a time of rapid transition and shifting perspectives in the 'solution to the Jewish Question' – a time when the intention to undertake an enormous deportation programme leading to total annihilation in work camps in occupied Soviet territory after the end of the war was rapidly giving way to the realization that the Jews would have to be destroyed during the war, and in the territory of the General Government.¹⁴⁰ Viewed in this way, the Wannsee Conference was not the orchestration of an existing plan of the 'Final Solution'; rather it ushered in the final stage of escalation of the extermination policy – the incorporation of the whole of German-occupied Europe in a comprehensive programme of systematic annihilation of the Jews.¹⁴¹ The evolution of such a programme, once initiated as a planned operation, rapidly gathered pace in the spring. Decisions to widen the killing from the districts of Lublin and Galicia to the whole of Poland, in what was now coming to be called '*Aktion Reinhardt*' (linking the three extermination camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka), and to liquidate practically all Jews deported from the Reich and other parts of central Europe, were taken around the end of April and beginning of May 1942. By early June a programme had been drawn up for the deportation of Jews from western Europe to begin in July.¹⁴² Most were transported to the largest of the extermination camps by then in operation, Auschwitz-Birkenau. By the summer of 1942, then, the 'Final Solution' as history knows it was fully under way. By the end of 1942, a high proportion of the victims of the Holocaust – according to the SS's own calculations, close to four million – had already been murdered.¹⁴³

In Gerlach's view, 'the presumption that there never was a central decision by Hitler about the murder of European Jews' is 'not sustainable'.¹⁴⁴ The arguments he himself advances for such a decision being taken in December 1941 do not, however, compel. Rather, Hitler's speech to party leaders on 12 December (and his private discussions around the same time with Himmler and other key figures) can probably best be interpreted

139 Gerlach, 'Wannsee-Konferenz', p. 32.

140 Longerich, *Politik*, pp. 470–1.

141 Longerich, *Politik*, pp. 476, 513–16, 583–6.

142 Longerich, *Politik*, pp. 514–15.

143 *Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers*, p. 73 (citing the 'Korherr-Bericht' of 23 March 1943).

144 Gerlach, 'Wannsee-Konferenz', p. 44. Gerlach's attack here is particularly directed at Hans Mommsen, 'Realisierung', pp. 416–17, who was among the first to emphasize a process of continuing escalation rather than a long-term pre-formulated programme in the development of the 'Final Solution'.

as providing crucial sanction from the highest authority, through his tirade of genocidal hatred at a time of momentous significance for the Reich and in a context he had long 'prophesied' would result in the destruction of the Jews, for the murderous policies desired or indeed already being put into operation by local Nazi rulers in the eastern territories. At the same time, Hitler's renewed attack on the Jews gave added impetus to the quest by the RSHA leadership to provide the necessary co-ordination for what Heydrich still termed, with justification, at the Wannsee Conference, 'the coming final solution of the Jewish Question (*die kommende Endlösung der Judenfrage*).¹⁴⁵

Leaving aside Gerlach's insistence on a 'basic decision' by Hitler in December 1941, his overall interpretation fits well into what appears to be emerging somewhat tentatively and still with numerous points of unclarity or dispute – unsurprising given the complexity of the evidence – as a consensus in recent research on the genesis of the 'Final Solution'. This consensus amounts to an increasing readiness among scholars working in the field to accept that no single decision brought about the 'Final Solution', but that a lengthy process of radicalization in the search for 'a solution to the Jewish Question' between spring 1941 and summer 1942 – as part of an immense overall resettlement and 'ethnic cleansing' programme for central and eastern Europe, vitiated through the failure to defeat the Soviet Union in 1941 – was punctuated by several phases of sharp escalation. Hitler's express approval and sanction of the stages of escalation in the killing of the Jews is nowhere in question. The most important stages in this process were spring 1941 (in the planning of 'Barbarossa'), summer 1941 (the move to full-scale genocide in the Soviet Union), autumn 1941 (the consequences of Hitler's decision to deport Reich Jews and those of Bohemia and Moravia to the east), December 1941 (the aftermath of the declaration of war on the USA), and spring 1942 (the emergence of the co-ordinated programme of extermination).¹⁴⁶ Though Gerlach is dismissive of arguments which suggest that the last key decision fell only in the spring of 1942,¹⁴⁷ the piecemeal development of the 'Final Solution' – something intuitively put forward by Martin Broszat as long ago as 1977¹⁴⁸ – seems to be the most significant conclusion arising from an array of recent important regional studies of genocidal policy (including, not least, Gerlach's own).¹⁴⁹ Hitler's precise role in these key phases

145 Peter Longerich (ed.), *Die Ermordung der europäischen Juden. Eine umfassende Dokumentation des Holocaust 1941–1945*, Munich, 1989, p. 85; Noakes and Pridham, iii.1129, Doc. 849.

146 While varying approaches put emphasis on different phases (see, e.g., Aly, p. 398, Longerich, *Politik*, pp. 579–84), there appears to be wide acceptance of such a process of escalating radicalization.

147 Gerlach, 'Wannsee-Konferenz', p. 44.

148 Broszat, 'Genesis', p. 63.

149 Among the most important such studies are the study of the Distrikt Lublin already cited by Dieter Pohl, *Von der 'Judenpolitik' zum Judenmord*, and his *Nationalsozialistische*

remains for the most part hidden in the shadows.¹⁵⁰ But that does not mean it was unimportant. On the contrary: the impetus Hitler provided in the framing of the barbarous plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union, his approval of Himmler's widening of the genocidal remit in the Soviet Union in the summer, his eventual agreement in September to have the German Jews deported to the east, and his overt encouragement of extermination actions in December were all crucial strands of authorization for the emerging 'Final Solution'. The Führer's authorization of the vital steps into genocide was indispensable. That there was a single, all-encompassing 'Führer decision' seems very doubtful, and is in any case a secondary issue.¹⁵¹

Relating this discussion of the genesis of the 'Final Solution' to the polarized 'Hitlerist' and 'structuralist' interpretations – the one emphasizing a Hitler order as the culmination of a planned long-term programme directed towards extermination, the other stressing a process of permanent improvisation as a way out of self-made administrative difficulties – one would have to conclude that neither model offers a wholly satisfactory explanation.

For all the paralleled barbarity of his language, Hitler's direct actions are difficult to locate. Though his hatred for the Jews was undoubtedly a constant, the relationship of his hatred to actual policy changed considerably over time as the policy options themselves narrowed. Hitler himself took relatively little part in the overt formulation of that policy, either during the 1930s or even the genesis of the 'Final Solution' itself. His major role consisted of setting the vicious tone within which the persecution took place and providing the sanction and legitimation of initiatives which came mainly from others. More was not for the most part necessary. The vagaries of anti-Jewish policy both before the war and in the period 1939–41, out of which the 'Final Solution' evolved, belie any notion of 'plan' or 'programme'. The radicalization could occur without any decisive steerage by Hitler. His influence was, however, all-pervasive, and his direct intervention in anti-Jewish policy was on occasion crucial. Above all, his dogmatic, unwavering assertion of the ideological imperative – 'getting rid of the Jews' from Germany, then finding a 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question' – which had to be translated into bureaucratic and executive

Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien. Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens (Munich, 1996); Thomas Sandkühler, 'Endlösung' in Galizien. *Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz* (Bonn, 1996); the study of anti-Jewish policy in the 'Warthegau' by Peter Witte, mentioned earlier. The forthcoming study by Christian Gerlach on extermination policy in Belorussia will be a significant addition. Peter Klein's work on the 'Warthegau' and Christoph Dieckmann's on Lithuania will provide further important insights into regional development. See also the contributions to Herbert (ed.) *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik*.

150 Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*, p. 278, accepts that this is the case in autumn 1941.

151 And is seen as such by Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*, pp. 286–7.

action, was the indispensable prerequisite for the escalating barbarity and the gradual transition into full-scale genocide.

Without Hitler's fanatical will to destroy Jewry, which crystallized only by 1941 into a realizable aim to exterminate physically the Jews of Europe, the Holocaust would almost certainly not have come about. But it would also not have become reality, as Streit has emphasized,¹⁵² without the active collaboration of the *Wehrmacht* – the one force still capable of checking the Nazi regime; or, for that matter, without the consent ranging to active complicity of the civil service bureaucracy, which strived to meet the requirements of spiralling discrimination, or the leaders of Germany's industries, who manufactured the death machinery and set up their factories at the concentration camps.¹⁵³ And within the SS–SD–Gestapo organizational complex, it was less the outright racial fanatics so much as the ambitious organizers and competent administrators like Eichmann and ice-cold executioners like Höss who turned the hellish vision into hell on earth.¹⁵⁴

The lengthy but gradual process of depersonalization and dehumanization of Jews, together with the organizational chaos in the eastern territories arising from the lack of clear central direction and concept, the horning together in the most inhumane circumstances of increasing masses of 'non-persons', provided the context in which mass killing, once it had been instigated in the Russian campaign, was applied *ad hoc* and extended until it developed into full-scale annihilation. At the same time, the 'Final Solution' did not simply emerge from a myriad of 'local initiatives': however falteringly at first, decisive steps were taken at the centre to co-ordinate measures for total extermination. Such central direction appears for the most part to have come from the Reich Security Head Office, though undoubtedly the most important steps had Hitler's approval and sanction.

Hitler's 'intention' was certainly a fundamental factor in the process of radicalization in anti-Jewish policy which culminated in extermination. But even more important to an explanation of the Holocaust is the nature of 'charismatic' rule in the Third Reich¹⁵⁵ and the way it functioned in sustain-

152 Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, esp. chs. 3, 6, 13.

153 See ch. 3 for a brief discussion of the economic contents in which the 'Final Solution' came about.

154 Hannah Arendt's controversial report of the Eichmann trial ended: 'The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal' (Arendt, *Eichmann* (see this chapter note 7), p. 253; see also pp. 18–31). According to their editor, Höss's autobiographical recollections reveal him as a 'petty-bourgeois, normal person' rather than a sadistic brute: Martin Broszat, ed., *Kommandant in Auschwitz. Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen des Rudolf Höß* (dtv-edn., Munich, 1978), p. 15. Ideological anti-semitism seems at best to have provided a secondary motive in these cases, as it does in the career of Franz Stangl, Commandant at Treblinka death-camp: see Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness* (London, 1974). However, it has to be added that there is no intrinsic contradiction between ideological conviction and managerial talent.

155 An attempt to view from a sociological perspective the links between the charismatic nature of Nazi rule and genocide is provided by Uta Gerhardt, 'Charismatische Herrschaft und Massenmord im Nationalsozialismus', *GG 24* (1998), pp. 503–38.

ing the momentum of escalating radicalization around 'heroic', chimeric goals while corroding and fragmenting the structure of government. This was the essential framework within which Hitler's racial lunacy could be turned into practical politics.

This examination of the complex development of racial policy, lying at the very heart of Hitler's *Weltanschauung*, has shown that, while it would be meaningless to speak of him as a 'weak dictator', it is also misleading to regard the Third Reich as a dictatorship with a coherent, unitary command structure providing for the regulated and centrally directed consistent implementation of Hitler's will. It remains to turn our attention to the area where Hitler's directing hand seems most evident: foreign policy.